



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600010546M

26.69.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.



A

S.A. 1827.

G U I D E

TO

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

BY THE REV. JAMES SHERMAN,
MINISTER OF CASTLE-STREET CHAPEL, READING.



LONDON :

JAMES NISBET, BERNER'S STREET.

1826.

69.

London : Printed by H. Fisher, Son, and P. Jackson.

PREFACE.

ERRATA.

- Page 94, line 5, for *desciples* read *disciples*.
.. 115, line 4, for *off of read only off*.
.. 144, line 9, for *forbdden* read *forbidden*.
.. 174, line 12, for *where* read *whence*.

their conviction, and accompanied them with a divine power to their minds; and requested their publication, for their own and others' advantage. With considerable reluctance I consented to appear thus in print; not from any disinclination to gratify them, nor that I considered the subject unimportant; but because I felt utterly

PREFACE.

unable to do it justice. This objection was overruled by some, to whose judgment I am accustomed to pay deference, and I have ventured, with much trembling, to send them forth into the world in their present form ; hoping, with my friends, that they may turn sinners from the power of Satan unto God.

As the work was prepared principally for the use of my own people, they will, I trust, receive it as a testimony of my warm attachment to their best interests, and of my growing desire that they, like the primitive disciples, may continually walk "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost." My pastoral labours among them are now suspended, and I cannot publicly inculcate the important truths of which it treats ; but it will comfort me in my affliction if this, as my representative, guides, advises, and consoles them in happy and holy walking.

PREFACE.

To literary fame I do not aspire ; usefulness alone I covet. I am persuaded that wise and good men will discover many imperfections in the work ; but if the Lord glorifies himself through this feeble effort, by introducing sinners to his acquaintance, and by leading babes in grace to press after higher attainments in the divine life, and professors of the gospel to walk more consistently with their high and holy calling ;—what becomes of my name will be of small importance.

J. SHERMAN

CLIFTON, *Octr. 20th*, 1826.

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER I. | 9 |
| CHAPTER II. | |
| ON THE NATURE OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD . . | 16 |
| CHAPTER III. | |
| ON THE ESSENTIAL MEANS OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD | 22 |
| CHAPTER IV. | |
| ON THE SUBORDINATE MEANS OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD | 69 |
| CHAPTER V. | |
| THE BEST SEASON FOR COMMENCING ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD | 108 |
| CHAPTER VI. | |
| ON THE ADVANTAGES OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD | 133 |

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

CHAPTER I.

"ACQUAINT now thyself with God, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee," was advice worthy of Eliphaz, and suited to Job, under any circumstances, though it is evident he misunderstood his case. In the previous verses he had accused him of great guilt: "Is not thy wickedness great, and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee;" thus supposing the whole of his trials to be the reward of impiety. Now although he was mistaken in Job, the advice is adapted to the

character he supposed him to be. If you are a wicked man, whose life, like that of the pagan Romans, has been employed in adding iniquity to iniquity, and thereby treasuring up to yourself wrath against the day of wrath; or if at this moment you should be suffering, in your body and estate, the wages of sin, in pains, and poverty, and privations; be it known unto you, that to you is the word of this salvation sent. It points you to an object infinitely worthy of your highest love, to the only remedy for your fallen condition; and promises you that tranquillity of mind, and satisfying felicity, you have in vain sought in the world. Could we persuade you to make trial of this remedy, as you have done, unsolicited, of the lying vanities which have reduced you to your present lamentable state, you would find that it is a catholicon of inestimable worth, and promises no more than it actually bestows on all who attend to its directions.

The apostle declares of wicked men, that they do not “like to *retain* God in their knowledge.” A few thoughts of him will occasion-

ally force their way into the mind, but they do not like to retain them. They consider them at best but intruders, unwelcome guests; and they are glad when they depart, and the door of the heart is once more closed against them. And oh! it is sadly to be regretted that many who profess his name, though they like to retain him in their thoughts, yet are so much engrossed with the world and worldly things, that they are almost strangers to that constant heavenly communion it is their happy privilege and bounden duty to enjoy. It is not merely therefore to the wicked man, whose heart is in the world and the world in his heart, that this exhortation is addressed; but to the beloved children of God, to the blood-bought sons of his own family, to those who have already begun to walk with God. It is adapted to encourage and stimulate *them* to press forward to the attainment of that object for which they have been apprehended of Christ Jesus, by giving the strongest possible pledge that, through the favour he bears unto his people, they shall see the good of his chosen, rejoice in the glad-

ness of his nation, and glory with his inheritance. The fool hath said in his heart, "*There is no God :*" or, as it would more properly read, by leaving out the supplementary words in italics, "No God." Not that he disbelieves the existence of God, but would fain persuade himself he is not the God the bible represents him to be ; he thinks him altogether such an one as himself, and wishes that he did not exist. And is not this title almost as appropriate to us, who not only acknowledge there is a God, but have the unspeakable felicity to call him *our God* ; and know that his presence constitutes the highest bliss, yet are in too great a measure indifferent to his society, and can only admit this supreme and condescending Lord as an occasional visitor ? If Jesus said to the disciples, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," how much more may he now apply this epithet to us, who, in the full blaze of gospel light, with the whole canon of scripture complete, with the exceeding great and precious promises of spiritual wealth and happiness, and with our experience

of the great rewards he has bestowed upon us in keeping his commandments, yet disbelieve or neglect the blessedness of his society?

The advice is applicable especially to those who are beginning to hesitate whether they are not sacrificing too much for Christ, and whether they may not unite the pleasurable follies and maxims of the world with decision on the Lord's side; who have already gone some few steps backward; who do not feel that heavenly relish for divine things which engaged their souls some few months since; who see less strongly the necessity of cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart, of diligent perseverance in his ways, and unreserved devotedness to him, as their Lord, their life, their all. This should be considered as an exhortation from the lips of him from whom they have revolted, to bring them back again to the original fountain of their bliss, their first husband; to revive their first love to him, by watering its withered roots with his own; and to convey an assurance that, to whatever sources they may go, for spiritual delights, their delectable

things will not profit, since the supreme good they seek is found only in perpetual friendship with the Lord of life and glory.

The design of the following treatise is to stir up your heart, dear reader, to remember this much neglected, because too little prized privilege, and to bring down a present portion of that heaven into your spirit, which you hope finally to enjoy. Ask of God to bless it for this purpose. Before you read one page more, entreat that unction from above, by which you may understand the things which shall make for your peace. He can bless this feeble effort to remove the clouds from your mind, to discover how he loves you, and will bless you, that you may rejoice before him all the days of your life.

The following chapters will explain to you the nature of that acquaintance which is urged upon you; the means by which it may be attained; the best season for commencing it; and the advantages you will gain by it. And oh! may that blessed and holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, put energy into these words;

shed a divine light on your understanding to receive them; and so direct your heart by them to the love of God in Christ Jesus, that you, like Abraham, may henceforth be called "the friend of God," and reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE NATURE OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

THE word Acquaintance signifies, not a mere knowledge of a person's face, as by seeing him occasionally pass, or meeting him as a stranger at a friend's house, but that intimacy which subsists between one friend and another. The term is used in scripture to express the familiarity of friendship: "thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company." And though sometimes used for the distant relations of a family, it universally implies persons of whom we know more than of men in general, and with whom we have more habitual converse. Thus David, in the psalm he composed for the regulation of his conduct to his household, declares, "I will not *know* a wicked person;" I will not acquaint myself with them, they shall not be servants to my commands, nor friends in whom to

lodge the secrets of my heart: "mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may *dwell* with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall *serve* me." A cold speculative knowledge of Christ may give us some idea of his character, and some perception of his his works; but it leaves the mind uninfluenced, unexcited to heavenly things, without an impulse to love, serve, and enjoy him. Satan knows him well; but hates him the more, because he knows his power, his omniscience, and his dignity. He believes, and trembles. Nor is it an uncommon thing to see persons, whose education, as far as we can judge of it, has been perfectly consistent, whose parents have taken delight to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, whose knowledge of the gospel is extensive and correct, who nevertheless live in open rebellion against their consciences, or in entire indifference to fellowship with the Father, and with his Son. They study his character in the gospel, as many study a science, not for any practical purpose, but because it forms part

of their education, which would be incomplete without it. It is of no farther use to them, than to enable them to combat its opponents, or to feed the vanity and pride of their hearts.

But how different are the feelings of those, who are engaged in acquainting themselves with a subject from which their future support is to be derived, or many of their earthly pleasures! How eagerly do they lay hold of any book which bestows information! How do they delight in the society of men of learning in that branch of knowledge! What days and nights do they spend in toil, what sacrifices do they make, what ardour do they experience! And the text urges to an acquaintance with God which springs from love; which will tend to valuable practical results; which will afford unspeakable delight, and give great glory to his name;—an acquaintance which is to be sought with diligence and fervour, as that in which the very life and well-being, the present and eternal happiness of the soul, consists.

The object of this acquaintance, is the ever

blessed God; with whom no science, or creature of the most beautiful form, or heavenly endowments, is worthy of comparison. It pertains to the highest dignity of our nature, to know our great Original, from whom we derived our all, and it must be a part of our highest happiness to serve and adore him. He has given us capacities and desires which nothing can satisfy but himself. Creation, with all the variety of its objects, cannot do this; riches, honours, friends, comforts, pleasures, content not the mind. They leave a void, and contain an alloy, which, in their highest enjoyment, generates dissatisfaction. They were intended only as guides to lead us to God. There is a supreme good wanting, a fountain of eternal excellency, from which the soul may be ever drawing without fear; solacing itself in purity, love, light, truth, the elements of its primeval happiness, to which it must return before bliss will return to it. And where is this supreme good to be found, but in the infiniteness, and unsullied glory, of the Almighty God? An acquaintance with such an object

is worthy of the highest intellect and the most splendid gifts. Reason may here find its legitimate employment in contemplating and adoring his perfections. God, revealing his glories in the person of Christ, is sufficient for the soul's eternal entertainment. Love may spend itself here without fear of excess, or evil consequences. He will never deceive us; our love shall be returned to us in full measure, pressed down, and running over. Pleasure, unutterable pleasure, may be had in God, our exceeding joy. All prospects of delight, and fountains of life, spring up in him. The river of his pleasures continually flows to his children; the banquet of his love is always spread; the welcome always the same; himself always present; and in his presence there is fulness of joy, at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. "Therefore thus saith the Lord, Let not the rich man glory in his riches, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise lov-

ing-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth, for in these things do I delight, saith the Lord." Who then would not be honoured by such intimacy? How far, how very far, are we from such a life; and how little energy is put forth for its attainment! Is there not a lamentable disposition in our hearts to put off that best of friends, and sweetest of society, with a very slight acquaintance; and to understand the benefit of heavenly, spiritual communion, more by the lives of eminently holy men, than by our own experience? And certainly the fault is not in him. He has prepared a heaven on earth for us, if we will enjoy it; a river that shall always make glad the inhabitants of the city of God, if we are not too sensual to drink of its exhilarating waters. Come then, my beloved, awake to righteousness, and sin not. Let the time past suffice, wherein you have wrought the will of Satan. Stir up your hearts to a consideration of those means by which this acquaintance may be commenced, or promoted; and the God of peace shall be with you.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ESSENTIAL MEANS OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

BEFORE you proceed to any subordinate methods of establishing this acquaintance, there are two fundamental truths which must be fast lodged in your mind, and continually remembered.

The first is this,

“THAT ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD MUST BE COMMENCED AND CARRIED ON THROUGH THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST.”

Your acquaintance is to be with God in Christ. It is true that in the works of creation, his existence and glory are manifested, and some acquaintance may be gained through them. His invisible power and Godhead are so clearly reflected from the works which he has made, and visible in them, that his eternal and underived *existence, his omnipotence, and other perfections,*

must be known from the beauty, excellency, variety, and immensity of his creatures, by all intelligent beings; except as their minds are debased and alienated from him by sin. "For that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." But all the knowledge we can ever attain of God's perfections, works, or glory, which will tend to our salvation, is through Christ. You will be fully convinced on this subject, if you read the following passages: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.—If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father;

and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?—For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

In him all his perfections most illustriously shine. “*The love of God* which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That he might shew the exceeding riches of *his grace* in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.—The exceeding greatness of *his power*, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. To give us the light of the knowledge of the *glory of God*, in the face of Jesus Christ.”

There is an intimate and indissoluble union between the Father and the Son. “Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” We cannot know, love, hate, or serve, the one, without the same dispositions towards the other. “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. That all men should honour the Father, as they honour the Father. If ye love me, ye should have known my Father

also. The knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord." If we love Christ, the Father loves us, and will make his abode with us; if we despise Christ, we despise him that sent him, and shall be lightly esteemed by him.

If therefore we are seeking an acquaintance with God, this truth must be acted upon, that Jesus Christ is God's established medium of communication with us. No audience of the Majesty of heaven can be obtained, but through him. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And the reason is this: Sin was, and is still, a mighty obstacle to acquaintance with God. This broke the friendship, and placed man at enmity with God. And therefore he says to you this day, The fault is not in me: I never sent you away from my presence, with a "get thee hence," but "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Now till sin is renounced, and reconciliation effected, no friendship can exist. And this must be done on the most honourable terms.

The claims of justice must not be sacrificed at the shrine of mercy. God must be just while merciful, equitable while compassionate. His honour will not allow him to befriend the sinner, without receiving satisfaction for his offences.

With what rapture should we contemplate the fact, that he has devised a scheme whereby all this has been effected! He has laid help upon one that is mighty. He has exalted one chosen out of the people, his elect, in whom his soul delighteth. Now he, as the covenant head of the church, loved it, became its surety, and gave himself for it, that he might redeem it from all iniquity. The Father transferred its guilt to him, and "made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" and thus reconciled us to himself, by Jesus Christ.

There is therefore no way of commencing this acquaintance, but by the cross of Christ. Vows, and penances, and promises of amendment *not* sufficient. Satisfaction to divine

justice, and cordiality to the sinner, meet only in the cross. They blend their rays, as the colours of the rainbow, and form a halo of glory round that celestial spot. The cross is the centre of all God's purposes of mercy to fallen man, around which they shine with so resplendent a lustre, that they eclipse all other systems intended to lighten man into the secret place of the Almighty. If you therefore sincerely desire to be a friend of God, and to live habitually in his favour, Christ's atonement must be the basis upon which your hopes are raised. He causes all his love to settle on his Son, and your's must fix on him also. He is well pleased with the work of his Son, and you must be satisfied in it also. He has depended on the pledge of his Son, and he will have you depend on it also; for "him hath *he set forth* for a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." He has

set him forth as the brazen serpent was exhibited by Moses, that you might behold his virtues, and, looking on him, live.

Disdain not this method of love. Any thing put in competition with him will be ruinous to your soul. He cannot allow the most splendid sacrifices to compensate for faith in his Son. "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ;" the first and great commandment of the gospel, which indeed includes every other. To observe any other while this is despised, is but to offer an insult to his wisdom and authority. Certainly we should not account that man our friend, or wish him to be familiar with us, who, in spite of all instituted decorum and our repeated entreaties, scaled our wall and climbed in at the window, rather than enter in by the door. And what is your conduct, but a neglect of Christ, the door by which all who are received into our Father's house as his children must enter in; while you, like a thief and a robber, climb up some other way? How can you hope for the friendship of God, upon prin-

ciples so opposite to his revealed will? Be not deceived, either by the delusions of Satan, the antiscriptural opinions of false teachers, or the pride of your own hearts. God will not be mocked. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath life; and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." This is his command, O beloved, and this is his promise: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

This little work may now be in the hands of one who still thinks that something must be added to the perfect work of Jesus; that something commendatory in him is essential to this blessed acquaintance. Is this your condition, beloved reader? Do you ask in sincerity, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" What can I bring to commend myself to his notice? "Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I

give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" God shall give you an answer of peace; for "if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee? but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." He has required satisfaction for thy offences of another, even Jesus, his dear Son; and he gave it, and that work is for ever finished. Of it he has testified his approbation in raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. There is therefore now no more sacrifice for sins. He does not ask any propitiation of you. All the wonderful and gracious work of constituting a sinner righteous in his sight, belongs to God, and to God alone. Let me call your attention to that full description which the apostle gives of the nature of the righteousness required, and the manner in which you are to possess it. "Now the righteousness of *God without the law* is manifested, being wit-

nessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." The righteousness in which you must come before him is emphatically styled, "the Righteousness of God." "It is God that justifieth." This righteousness accomplished by the death of his dear Son was devised by him for his own honour. It is perfect and everlasting. It sprung from the overflowing fulness of his marvellous grace, and to the eternal glory of that grace it shall redound. "Without the law:" it is wholly evangelical in its character, and perfectly distinct from a legal righteousness, in which many boast and put their trust. It admits not of any additional excellency from man; not even of faith, repentance, or good works of any kind. These are fruits arising from a justified state, but not the cause of our justification before God; for faith and repentance are as much the gifts of God as justification itself. "Moses describeth the righteousness, which is of the law, that the man which doeth these things shall live by them."

But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)" No; there is no necessity for Christ's appearing again to introduce another righteousness: the work is already done. He "brought in an everlasting righteousness." It cannot be rendered more complete by any man or angel; and "therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." "Is manifested:" the gospel brings it into open day-light, and exhibits it as its principal subject and glory. "I am not ashamed (said Paul) of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Do you ask for what purpose the gospel is sent? it is to manifest the righteousness of God to justify sinners; it is to set before you the way of life by which you may enter into his presence with *gladness*. "Being witnessed by the law and

the prophets:" the ceremonial law was a constant witness to the Jews of their need of a better righteousness than their own. The blood of their victims was but a type of the blood of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. And to him give all the prophets witness, that in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified. They all directly or indirectly bear testimony to the necessity, certainty, excellency, and glory, of the righteousness of God. "By faith of Jesus Christ:" faith is the great instrument by which it is made ours; it discovers its suitableness, and owns its excellency. The believer apprehends and receives it, renounces his own righteousness, and submits cheerfully to that of God. For the righteousness of faith saith, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "Unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference:"—what delightful tidings! "We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

You need not bring any price in your hand, it is enough if you believably apply for it, it is enough if you renounce every other, and fix all your dependence here. Yes; whatever you have been, whether a profligate sinner or amiable as Nathaniel; whether in the prime of manhood or in the decline of age; whether exalted as Pilate or condemned as the thief,—this righteousness is unto all and upon all them that believe: It is “unto all” judicially imputed and placed to their account; “upon all” as a robe of righteousness, and a garment of salvation, ornamenting them with spotless purity. God makes no difference here between the prince and the beggar. The rich shall bring no more, and the poor must bring no less, when they make an atonement to God for their souls.

This, beloved, is God’s method for you to approach him. And what does he require of you but to acquiesce in the plan of his own divine equity; to offer him no less sacrifice than the glory of his perfections demand, a sacrifice equal to the demerit of sin; to em-

brace the free and unmerited terms of the gospel, "where mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other;" to love them as the prisoner would love the tidings of pardon, as the slave would welcome the news of liberty, as the blind receive their sight; to accept this righteousness as a free gift, prize it as a suitable remedy, and be thankful to the Author for the blessings it imparts. This, this is all he requires of you, O man. And do not these terms well suit one so poor, and so guilty, and so unworthy, as you? Can any plan you have ever conceived be so well adapted to your state? O what news is this for a poor trembling sinner! "Ye who were afar off are now made nigh by the blood of Christ." This rends the vail of separation, and opens a free passage into the audience-chamber of the ever blessed God. This turns the judge into a friend, the avenger into a protector. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, though the veil, that is to say

his flesh, and having an high-priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

Plutarch tells us, that when Themistocles fled from the malice of his countrymen, he sought protection of king Admetus; but as his name, by his former conduct, was hateful to the king, he could expect only banishment or destruction by such a proceeding. He therefore resolved on this expedient: as he passed to the throne, he saw the king's son, a beautiful child, whom he immediately took up in his arms, kneeled at his feet, presented himself with the child to the king, and pleaded for his life in the name of the king's son. The king was so affected with his plea, that he immediately received him into his friendship, and secured him from threatened destruction. I will not insist upon the correctness of the analogy; as in this case personal resentment is diffused and disarmed by parental fondness. It is God who loved the criminal, and gave

his Son. His wrath is judicial, and is removed, not by fondness, but by atonement. Yet if you would be acquainted with God, imitate Themistocles. Take the King's Son in the arms of your faith to the footstool of his mercy. Plead his mediation and perfect righteousness, and the King of heaven will say to you, as Laban said to Abraham's servant, but with more affection and stability, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?"

Now if this acquaintance has been commenced, nothing can maintain it but a constant remembrance of, and dependence upon, the finished work of Jesus Christ. Sin often breeds a sad estrangement from God, in the minds even of his people. Wherever it is indulged, or excused, or allowed in the smallest degree, there will be a disinclination to his presence and society, a listlessness in duty, a carelessness in prayer, a want of appetite for ordinances. Many charge these things upon Satan, as the effect only of his temptations, and so sometimes they are; but more fre-

quently they are the results of some secret iniquity, not repented of, and not forsaken. A little time allowed for self-examination would discover to us, in most cases, that the cause is nearer home. Conscience would remind us of some thoughts, or words, or actions, inconsistent with our high character as sons of God, and with the large professions of love and gratitude we have made to his name. And God, therefore, very justly, hides his face when we do come; he will not vouchsafe us the gracious tokens of his favour we have formerly experienced; he calls for a cloud to darken our path; bids us walk for a season in the vale of tears; and determines to go, and return to his place, till we acknowledge our offences, and seek his favour.

What then should be our conduct under such circumstances? Surely not to leave off visiting his throne, as if we were offended with him; nor to sink in despondency, and give up our return as hopeless. This is but to add iniquity to iniquity, and misery to misery. He shall tell *you what to do*. "Go, and proclaim these

words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever; only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." And to whom can you go, beloved, but unto him? He has the words of eternal life. You have no other refuge than that which first secured you from the storm; no other blood to wash away guilt, than that which first cleansed your polluted soul. You must again come hither, as you first came, a poor guilty offender, and cast yourself upon the boundless mercy of God through Jesus Christ: "for the Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble, and they that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." John tells us the object of his epistle was to prevent believers from sinning; but if any man did transgress, "we have (says he) an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for

our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." O! there is nothing calculated to make us fly from sin, or mourn over departure from God, or glow with holy zeal for his service, and love to his presence, like that sweet thought, that when we were as sheep going astray, turning every one to his own way, the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all; that it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief, to make his soul an offering for sin; that he himself bore our sins, in his own body, on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness. One beam of divine love, darting into the heart of a backslider, will more effectually melt it than all the flames of Sinai.

Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon
Soon dissolves a heart of stone.

And the atoning work of Jesus must be remembered, not only to renew our acquaintance, but to continue it to the end. If we would be

the friends of God, we must set the Lord always before us, as our high example of devotedness to his Father; we must see him as crucified amongst us, as having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; we must consider the apostle and high-priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, having entered once into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us. We must consider him as enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds. We must see him ascending up on high, and leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men, and enrich ourselves with his splendid gifts, which, like a triumphant conqueror, he so freely scatters among his followers. We must see him ever living to make intercession for us. We must look for, and hasten unto, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to judgment; who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, when we shall be caught up by angels to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall ever be with the Lord. This spiritual knowledge of

Christ is the key to open the intercourse of heaven, and shut us into the presence of God. As the love of Christ dwells in us, so will our acquaintance be firm and perpetual. The apostle felt no constraining influence equal to this, and therefore bowed his knees daily unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Ephesians, that they might "comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that they might *be filled with all the fulness of God.*" And his prayer for others corresponded with his own practice. He fed his altar with God's fire, and the flame never went out. His thoughts made Christ their centre, and his atonement the comfort which delighted his soul. Christ's death was his life; Christ's cross his crown; Christ's righteousness his glory; Christ's honour his aim. Hear him tell you how the life of acquaintance was perpetuated: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of

the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Would you, beloved, be intimate with God? Make Christ your alpha and omega. Encourage your hearts with repeated recollections that you are chosen in him, blessed in him, justified in him. Let this be your daily motto for perseverance in this heavenly friendship; "Seeing we have a great high priest, which is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession: for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted, like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

—The second great truth to be especially remembered is, that

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD REQUIRES THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Sin breeds a distaste in the mind for the spiritual delights, which spring from the knowledge

of God. A sinner is as averse to acquaintance with God, as God is opposed to him. His ways, pursuits, and thoughts, are all directly contrary to God's, and the language of every action is, "Depart from me, for I desire not a knowledge of thy ways." Else why are not his most reasonable commands delighted in? especially since man's happiness is inseparable from obedience to his precepts. The sinner beholds him as inexorably just, and ready to punish; and therefore can no more delight in his presence, than the guilty prisoner in that of his judge. He is so blinded to all his glorious perfections, that he can see no excellency worth enjoying. All his visits to his throne are mere drudgery, the effect of habit, or education, or slavish fear; and therefore, to this delightful spot, the theatre or card-table, household affairs or city business, the coffee-room or the walk of pleasure, are infinitely preferred. So estranged is the heart from himself, that nothing can bring it back again but his own divine influence. The restoring of a lost sheep is the work of the shepherd; he must seek it, find it,

and place it in the fold, or it will wander still farther from home. Even afflictions, and judgments of the severest class, are insufficient to remedy this evil. The situation of Israel nationally was most afflicting. "Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the holy one of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." And yet the prophet was so confident that nothing but the grace of God could accomplish their reformation and renovation, that he exclaims, "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more." The cup of bitterness is never the cup of salvation, if the water of life be not the principal ingredient. Volcanoes have poured forth their liquid fire, and devastated whole towns and neighbourhoods; the earth has opened her mouth, and swallowed up thousands; rivers have overflowed their banks, and swept away the property and lives of men; afflictions, bereavements, and troubles, like wave after wave, have visited families where God is not loved,

and yet the inhabitants do not learn righteousness, they will not seek the Lord and his strength, even his face for evermore. O! there is nothing but a divine power, that can bring a soul to love, serve, and enjoy God. Hence you may account for the failure of so many of your vows and good resolutions. Does not the recollection of promises made in former trouble and affliction, sometimes force a sigh and a tear? Then you said, If the Lord raise me from this bed, my life shall henceforth be his. If he will graciously deliver me from this trouble, I will lead a different life: his ways, his house, his service, shall be my delight. But the strength you received by that deliverance has been employed in a course of iniquity; your resolutions fled with your trouble, and return only as spectres to alarm you. Learn, then, this fundamental truth, the first principle of the doctrine of Christ: Through Christ we have access by the *Spirit* unto the Father.

The carnal mind, under whatever circumstances it be found, of polished life or savage barbarism, is enmity against God; it is not

subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. The natural man, whether wise as Solomon, or ignorant as a heathen, discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him. The blind may as easily discern the spots in the sun, as you discover the glory of God in Christ, without divine illumination. It must be revealed unto you by his Spirit. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. By this light you will see yourself in your true character; and then your enlightened understanding will discover Jesus, in his person and worth, as an all-sufficient Saviour; together with the suitableness, excellency, sufficiency, and superiority, of the things that are eternal, in comparison with the things which are temporal, however precious in your estimation. Your judgment is already convinced that all on earth is vanity; that every thing perishes with the using; that there is not enough in all the gaieties, fascinations, and pleasures of this life,

to make an immortal mind happy; and yet your affections cleave to them, as if your bliss depended entirely on their use. What but a divine influence can unrivet the fast hold they have taken of the things of the earth, and immoveably set them on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; can make you choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; can help you to say to the followers of the despised Nazarene, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you; deliberately to prefer the things you now despise, associate with the people you now abhor, and walk in the ways you now avoid? Yes, you must be born from above, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, or you cannot walk in them. Beloved, the object of this good work is to restore God's moral image, which is created in righteousness and true holiness; for as we must not appear but in the royal robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, the garment of our elder brother, so neither without our ornaments, even that of a meek and quiet

spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price; a broken and a contrite heart, a sacrifice which he will not despise; the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which he has no law. A man is but as a whited sepulchre, till this inward renovation is effected, however moral his conduct, or unblameable before men his character. No honours, or riches, or talents, or alms, can supply the deficiency of these heavenly graces. Nicodemus was a person with whom few could vie, in the integrity of his principles, the esteem of his character, and the amiableness of his deportment; and yet the very first lesson the Saviour taught him was, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto *thee*, ye must be born again."

Beloved, "two cannot walk together except they be agreed." Then how unfit are you for acquaintance with God! "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And

what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Your body is not the temple of the living God; but sin reigns in it, unto death. There is an unholy backwardness to come into his presence. But when this good work of regeneration is begun, a divine and indissoluble union with him is produced. He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit; and hence proceeds acquaintance. Union is the foundation of fellowship, and fellowship is the effect of union. In that inimitable example of acquaintance between Jonathan and David, the Holy Ghost shews that the communion they enjoyed was founded in union of heart. "It came to pass when David had made an end of speaking, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Then we read of the covenants they made, of the gifts they presented, of their tender converse and mutual sorrow, of the pledges of their love, and the tears they shed at their departure from each other. Union of soul produced these things, and at last drew from the pen of David an unequalled and pathetic elegy,

on the decease of his beloved Jonathan. And you will not love God, nor his service, till the stony heart is taken out of your flesh ; till that obdurate, obstinate, unbelieving principle is removed, and a living, susceptible, bleeding heart is bestowed. Then the stream of your affections will naturally reverse its course, and flow into its original and legitimate ocean, God, who is love. Yes ; when he sheds light upon the eyes of your understanding, which have been long closed in darkness, and unlocks the will, which has been stubbornly and secretly bolted against your rightful sovereign, and opens a well of living water in your heart, which, springing up into everlasting life, shall cleanse that worse than Augean stable, and sanctify body, soul, and spirit ; then shall you become the temple of the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. He will dwell in you, and walk in you ; he shall say, It is my people, and you shall say, The Lord is my God. A vital union will be formed. A holy friendship will be established, upon scriptural and rational principles ; a friendship which no alteration of worldly cir-

cumstances shall affect ; a friendship which shall cause him to know your soul in adversities ; to bow down his ear to your supplications ; to lift up the light of his countenance upon you ; to supply your necessities ; to make your interests his own ; and to reserve for eternity the full development of his love, in the perfect conformation of your spirit to his own, and the grant of perpetual residence in his presence above. "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me : for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth ; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

I am willing to extend these remarks ; for I fear lest Satan should get an advantage over you, (for we are not ignorant of his devices) and persuade you that, as fitness for this acquaintance must arise from the operations of the holy Spirit alone, you may sit down in the

chair of sloth, and fold your arms in indifference, and take this soporific draught from the prince of darkness: If I am an elect vessel of mercy, then I shall be saved; if not, I must be lost. Dearly beloved, is your heart desirous of this acquaintance? Then hearken not to the wicked one. The promise of the Spirit is made distinctly to you as a sinner, however guilty your former life, to lead you into this happy communion, and make you a friend of God. Hear you not the sound? "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge?" Now search, and see to which of these classes you belong. Are you "a simple one," guided by the fashions of others, and filled with simple prejudices against the ways of God, without a will, or decision of character sufficient to investigate and judge for yourself; sporting with your own deceivings, and flatter-

ing yourself in your wickedness? Or, are you "a scorner," who feels a satanic pleasure in converting the threatenings and promises of God into profane jests; whose proud heart has treated with contempt the doctrines, laws, admonitions, and warnings of the love of God, as well as parental and ministerial advice; and now, as if in defiance of the authority of heaven, joining league with the confederates of hell, and asking with consummate effrontery, Who is the Almighty that I should serve him; and what profit should I have if I pray unto him? Or are you "a fool," who hates knowledge, (and fools only hate such knowledge) professing a rooted antipathy to serious godliness and reformation, yet vainly supposing that, although you live in the constant neglect of divine things, you know enough to take you to heaven, and that all will go well with you at the last? Surely more guilty characters can hardly be found. Yet to them this loving language is addressed: "Turn you at my reproof; behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." If you then

are not his friend, the fault does not lie with him. If you are the companions of fallen angels for ever, you will not have to charge him with a neglect of inviting you to better society and purer joys. Your blood will be upon your own head. But does not such love melt your heart? Are you not astonished that you, an ungrateful rebel, should be thus intreated to become acquainted with him whom you have despised, provoked, and rejected? That he should stoop to you, who have exalted yourself against him, and with the melting tenderness of a father over a prodigal, advise, persuade, and invite you to be his for ever? Hearken to his voice, dear reader; it shall be for your health. Incline your ear, and go unto him; hear, and your soul shall live.

Again: Are you really in earnest about the salvation of your soul? Do you desire to forsake the world, to be the Lord's child, and cleave henceforth to him with full purpose of heart? Is the salvation of Christ suitable, and God's beloved precious to you? What do you answer before God? Yes, indeed, these are

the desires of my soul! I know that, whereas I was once blind, now I see; yet I want the assurance of faith, the satisfaction that I am elected of God, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost; and I fear that one so unworthy and ignorant can never hope for so unspeakable a privilege? O beloved, whatever you may think of yourself, you are not far from the kingdom of God. Those very desires are more lovely in God's eyes, than the most costly sacrifices. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." The light by which you have already discovered something of your real character, and a little of the superior excellency of Christ's service, came from the Sun of righteousness; and he will not despise the work of his own hands, however indistinct may be your views, or weak your desires. "The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench." Grace is poured into his lips, to utter words to strengthen the reed, and fan the flax to a flame. Hear, and the Lord give you an understanding heart to receive them, "If ye, being

evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Are you a parent? Do you know the willingness of parental love to give a darling infant the good things for which it cannot ask, but by tears and inarticulate cries? Have you printed kisses on its cheek, and wished for a thousand blessings to pour on its lovely head? Have you cheerfully sacrificed your own ease, comfort, and peace, to bestow them upon your babe? How much more shall the Fountain of love itself, from which all your tender sympathies are derived, give all good things, in this one, the Holy Spirit, to you who ask him?

It is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Happy indeed are they who can add, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." It must however be remembered, that our acquaintance

with God can be perpetuated only by the abiding presence and influence of the Holy Ghost. Our spirits must not only be quickened by him, but kept alive; else all our communion with God will be toilsome, we shall be like a person labouring under some enfeebling disease, which causes indifference to the society of the friend he loves. The flesh lusteth against the spirit; and if the flesh, in its affections and lusts, is not crucified, we shall be continually under its influence, which will drive us any where rather than to commune with God. Now the lusts of the flesh can be subdued and mortified only by a continual supply of the Spirit of grace. "If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Mortification is unnatural to us. We love to please ourselves; to gratify our passions. The work requires some mightier agent than our own feeble resolutions, which too often yield to the solicitations of Satan, whose main object is to destroy the life of righteousness, by preventing this death unto sin. The inhabitation of the Spirit of God is therefore promised to all believers, to main-

tain this deadness to the world, this superiority to the flesh, this conquest over Satan; and thus ever to fit us for the presence of the holy Lord God Almighty. Jesus left it as his great legacy to the church, to which the weakest saint has a claim, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

Is not this our great error, that we are not sufficiently dependent on divine influence, to maintain within us that holy intimacy? Our judgment and conduct are greatly at variance. We know and approve the truth, and should feel there was something deficient in that sermon where the necessity of divine influence to walk with God was not introduced. And yet we enter upon the work as if all the power were in our own hands; as if continual walking the celestial road needed none of that food, of which if a man eat he shall live for ever; none of

those balmy gales of soul-reviving air which the Spirit breathes; none of that water which he causes to spring up to everlasting life, that we thirst not, and turn not to the broken cisterns of the world to draw; none of that effectual working, without which we have no part in Jesus, and remain unsanctified and impure; none of that divine direction which he bestows, as the guide into all truth. "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." How then are we so foolish? Have we begun in the spirit, and shall we end in the flesh? That be far from us. If we felt the value of his presence and influence as David did, we should dread his departure from us more than the loss of any terrestrial comfort we enjoy. It would be our daily prayer, Lord, whatever thou takest from me, houses, or lands, or wife, or children, or friends, or ordinances, or health, or wealth, "take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Now to cherish this heavenly desire, see how much you are indebted to him for his operations in this celestial intercourse, and how dependent

a creature you are upon his aid. "We have not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God." A knowledge of our condition is one of the blessed fruits he gives us. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God;" and his testimony is true, a satisfaction which no books, or friends, or minister, can supply. How necessary is this satisfaction, in our acquaintance with God! To be confident of this very thing, that he is our Father, and that I, though unworthy, and poor, and guilty, am his child; to have a rational assurance, from scriptural evidence, of adoption. How different is a servant; how bold is a child. The elect angels are not exalted to so high an honour. They approach the throne, but they veil their faces with their wings. They stand clothed in their own righteousness. That high and mysterious privilege of which we speak is reserved for you to enjoy. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your heart, crying, Abba, Father," in order

to maintain in you a filial, loving, obedient disposition, and childlike confidence.

What an invaluable blessing is such a heavenly prompter, to such forgetful hearts as ours! We rightly complain of our bad memories; bad indeed, to suffer most that is good to escape, and to lock up as a treasure all that is nonessential or injurious to our happiness. But he, says the Redeemer, "shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you." The treasury of comfort is the promises of God: yet how oft are they forgotten, and how spiritless and ineffectual, even when most improved by our own meditations. All the promises of Christ had no effect on the mind of the disciples: Why? The Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified; but when he was glorified, "then remembered they his words." And if, in seasons of distress, the Holy Spirit applies a suitable promise to the desponding mind, how strengthening to faith, how relieving to fear! Then every cloud is stamped with a rainbow, and every spot rejoices and blossoms as the

rose. It gilds the bed of death with beams from heaven, and directs and encourages a dying saint to enter his Father's house in peace.

And as the constancy of our acquaintance depends on believing views of the atonement of Christ, he is the object to which the hand of the Spirit continually points. "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." When guilt troubles the conscience, and unbelieving fears oppress the heart, he will conduct you in spirit to Calvary, and place you beneath that wondrous cross, where the fellow of Jehovah bled, and groaned, and died. You shall gaze with wonder and delight upon that precious blood, which gives dignity and harmony to every song which is sung in heaven. The tears of sorrow and of joy shall flow down your cheeks, as you look upon him whom you have pierced, while your heart shall respond to the dictates of the Spirit, He loved me, he gave himself for me. And as Brutus, when Lucretia killed herself in consequence of the brutality of Tarquin, snatched the dagger from the wound, and swore upon the reeking

blade immortal hatred to the tyrant, so shall you swear eternal enmity and war to those sins which crucified the Lord of life and glory, and separate you from the presence of God. And again and again casting away the filthy rags of your own righteousness, you will rest on a foundation, as extensive as the obedience of the Redeemer's life and death, and unshaken as his eternal power and godhead.

Yes: and when illiterate in the art of prayer, he helps your infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered, with groanings which reach the throne of glory, and move the heart of the God of glory, those inexpressible, but forcible and right words, which enter into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth, and maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God; he who searches all things, even the deep things of God, that knows all the secrets of his mysterious will, shall dictate your petitions, and direct your prayers. If, unskilful in the word of righteousness, and ignorant as untutored infancy, and shedding many a tear for a wise and understanding heart to be given you, "he shall

teach you all things;" not indeed all things you wish to know, but all things necessary to promote humble views of yourself, and exalted views of your Lord and Master; all things which characterize the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; all things which shall tend to fulfil that promise, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." Unlike an earthly tutor, he bestows the disposition and ability to receive his instructions. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." And is not this the knowledge after which you sincerely seek?

And when the dark cloud of adversity casts a gloom over all your future prospects, when family trials and worldly troubles crowd thickly upon you; when the fig-tree does not blossom, nor fruit is found in the vine; then he will be your Comforter. He shall shew you that the

rod in his hand is but a pencil, to draw God's image in fairer lines upon your soul; he shall give you skill, like the bee, to extract honey from the thorn as well as the rose; he, as the Spirit of might, shall give you strength to take up and bear your cross daily; he shall exhibit the Saviour, bearing a heavier cross for you, and carrying away your sins into a land of forgetfulness; and, however lightly others, who know not God, may seem to trip through the world, still, amidst all your afflictions, he shall convince you, that blessed is that man, and only he, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. He shall make you glory in tribulations, by shedding abroad the everlasting, inexpressible, and abiding love of God in your heart, and opening his riches in glory to supply your need. There shall be music in your conscience, while there is sorrow in your eye; a prospect of an eternal weight of glory, for your light affliction which is but for a moment; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, for the loss of your transitory possessions.

How will this drawing of the Spirit make you run after him, and without it how sluggishly will you proceed! Converse with God requires a truly spiritual mind. Flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; our carnal natures have no taste for these heavenly enjoyments; and therefore, provoke your hearts with this truth, to seek a large measure of divine assistance. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

Now, O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt? Why art thou fearful? Why art thou cast down, O trembling soul? Why art thou inwardly disquieted? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise him, who is the health of thy countenance, and thy God. What cause have you to fear? See upon whom the whole work depends; and what this blessed Spirit has already done for you. Once ye were darkness, but now light in the Lord; once far from God by wicked works, now brought nigh by the blood of Christ. He might have chosen whether he would have given you this grace or

not; but having begun to work in you, his grace and covenant oblige him to perfect the work, and prepare you as a bride for glory. Be therefore confident, with the apostle, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Your weakness, and ignorance, and unworthiness, are no obstacles; he is mightier than all your foes, and has remedies for all your complaints. You are already sealed by him unto the day of redemption, as the property of the Lord; and the impression shall never be effaced, but be more visible to your own and others' eyes, as you increase in the knowledge of God. Depend entirely upon his agency, to attain acquaintance with God. Put yourself into his hands, and say, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living? and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE SUBORDINATE MEANS OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

THESE, then, are the preliminaries to divine acquaintance, and its life when begun. But there are some subordinate methods as truly important and appointed. We must here pursue the same means we should use to acquaint ourselves with the character of any other friend. This acquaintance then is to be gained and improved, first,

BY HEARING AND RECEIVING THE REPORTS OF HIS FRIENDS.

The opinion of the world respecting him is of small importance to you. Its opinion of yourself is not very exalted, if you are a follower of God as a dear child; for just in proportion as you bear his image will the world hate you. Jesus has before told you, "If the world hate

you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." They are most incompetent judges, both of his character as a master, and of the blessedness of his acquaintance, since they hate both. We should not go to an out-door servant; who just received his master's orders once a week, and only saw him again at its close to receive his wages, for a report of the general conduct of that master; but to one who lived with him in the house, who saw his daily habits and the manifestations of his disposition. And should you not learn of those who are acquainted with God; who are in the habit of daily communion with him; who have had long experience of the blessedness of his servants; who wait upon him and hear his wisdom? And what do these people say? Jacob when dying left this testimony:—"The God that fed me all my life long, and the angel which redeemed me from all evil." Joshua, the captain of the Lord's host, declares in the same situation, "Behold this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the

good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." David the king of Israel, the man after God's own heart, avows, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word." Asaph testifies, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee." Nahum tells his flock, "The Lord is good: a strong hold in the day of trouble: and he knoweth them that trust in him." Paul says, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Now these were opinions derived from his service and presence. And the conduct of these saints testified their sincerity. Many of them sacrificed reputation, property, possessions, comforts, parents, friends, and life itself, for his sake. For believing in his Son,

separating themselves from the world, and avowing their love in Christ, "some were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented:" yet all bear record to his faithfulness and loving-kindness to their souls. Should not their testimony have some weight with you? Go, sit, and hearken to the conversation of an old disciple. Jesus appeared to the disciples as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. It naturally strengthens our affection to hear another speak well of the friend we love; and the Spirit of the Lord shall fan your spark of love into a flame, by the breath of such heavenly converse. Their good words shall make your heart glad, and help you to say with David, "Our fathers trusted in

thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. Therefore will I say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust."

Every sincere minister of the gospel is the friend of God. He has been previously called by his grace to the fellowship of his Son, and having handled the word of life, he comes to you as a faithful witness of the blessedness of this acquaintance. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.¶ And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." The substance of the report he brings is, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The work of the ministry was appointed to introduce you to a higher esteem of the friend of sinners, and through him to an acquaintance with God. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did

beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." If then you sleep away sermons; if the ambassadors who bring the treaty of peace are disesteemed; if the good news be disbelieved, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and reconcile them by his blood unto God; this acquaintance can never be begun. Think what an affront such impious disdain of such transcendent love must be to the Majesty of heaven. As soon as the Jews began to despise the messages of the prophets, of Jesus, and of his apostles, misery followed them; and they are now monuments of divine vengeance, for putting away from them the word of life. And think, I beseech you, what the reflections of a conscience already enlightened will be, when looking back upon neglected sabbaths, despised ordinances, and rejected sermons; "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!" And how can the reproach be borne, from him whom you might have served and enjoyed for ever? "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:

they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices."

Ye blessed disciples of the Lord Jesus, did not believing the witness of God concerning his Son first introduce you to him? "For the gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; and ye became followers of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, and joy of the Holy Ghost." Oh, when the news of a free pardon reached your convicted and condemned soul, when you saw that the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, had loved you, and given you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, what sacred and delightful communion had you with the Father and the Son! If the stones could speak and the chamber tell, they would each report the tears you shed, and the happiness you experienced, while uttering sentiments similar to these:

I thank thee, uncreated Sun,
That thy bright beams on me have shin'd :
I thank thee, who hast overthrown
My foes, and heal'd my wounded mind ;
I thank thee, whose enlivening voice
Bids my freed heart in thee rejoice.

Thee will I love, my joy, my crown !
Thee will I love, my Lord, my God !
Thee will I love ; though all may frown,
And thorns and floods perplex my road ;
Yea, when my heart and flesh decay,
Thee shall I love in endless day.

What was the result of this discovery and persuasion of his love to your soul? Certainly this ; "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

And as the sabbaths have succeeded weeks of toil and family care, when some man of God spake of the glorious honour of his Majesty and of his wondrous works, or told of his terrible acts, and declared his greatness, abundantly uttered the memory of his great goodness *and exulted* in his righteousness, what a glow

of celestial gratitude has filled your bosom for such tidings!—How little have you envied the worldling his joys! How trifling have all your trials appeared, when contrasted with the present privilege of such heavenly intercourse, and the hope of dwelling in the house of the Lord for ever! Oh! how does it endear God to the heart, to have found him sensibly present in the sanctuary, refreshing the soul with dews of spiritual comfort in the midst of fiery trials.

And as you believe the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. Wherever there is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a sincere desire to be intimately acquainted with God, through the person and work of Christ, to be rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as we have been taught; and for this purpose diligence in the means of grace, attention to the instructions of ministers, and association with the people of God; that soul shall find God faithful to his promise; “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of

thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

A second means of becoming acquainted with an individual is,

READING THE HISTORY OF HIS LIFE, AND DESCRIPTION OF HIS CHARACTER.

Biography makes us familiar with the habits of our ancestors, and introduces us to an acquaintance with the lives of eminent men of all ages and countries. The character of God in Christ is drawn in scripture with an unerring hand. There you have a delineation of his perfections, and a history of his ways towards the children of men. There he is seen glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. And to be habitually acquainted with him, you must habitually study his word. This is the decree and promise: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; *then* shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the

knowledge of God." God has remarkably connected our happiness with our industry. An indolent saint is a miserable being; so unlike him whose image he partially bears, as almost to destroy the likeness. How can such persons expect to arrive at the acquaintance David and Paul and Jeremiah enjoyed? Their acquaintance was perpetuated, not by occasional visions or revelations, but by a constant and assiduous search into God's revealed will. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. O, how I love thy law: it is my meditation all the day. From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." Peter saw the transfiguration of Christ on the mount, and beheld his glory; but lest we should suppose such revelations essential to our present peace, he directs us to the word of God, that secure and infallible basis. "We have a more sure word of prophecy," more sure than that very glorious manifestation which he saw; "unto which we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth

in a dark place." All is darkness respecting God, without this light. None can reveal to us what the infinite God is, but himself. This he has done in his word: and how can we then find out the place of the Lord, or the habitation of the mighty God of Jacob, or go even to his seat, so as to dwell with him, till this is a lamp to our feet? Reading, meditating, and digesting this word, adds a lustre to the character, a heavenly dignity to the mind. We are strong when the word of God abideth in us: having our loins girt about with truth, we run without weariness, and walk without fainting. The Bereans took not upon trust any thing the Apostles asserted, but were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they searched the scriptures daily, to see if these things were so; and *therefore many believed*.

The first of all the commandments is, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Our Saviour puts the knowledge of God before the love

of him, because we cannot love an object of whom we are ignorant. If there be dark and confused ideas of God in the understanding, there cannot be much true love of him in the heart, nor much acceptable service rendered to him. We shall be like the Athenians, who erected an altar to the unknown God. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Next to the belief of his existence this must follow. "There are three that bear record in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One." Jehovah, our Aleheim, is one Jehovah; three persons in one divine essence, without difference or inequality. To the scriptures alone we are indebted for this revelation. The world by wisdom knew not God. All the learning of Greece and Rome could not furnish a rational idea of the true God. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping

things." How should I bless him that hath given me, a poor ignorant, deluded, guilty sinner, "the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ." How then should I love and search that blessed book, which tells me what my God is, and how he has acted towards me. There I read, that God the Father hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: that the Holy Ghost regenerates and sanctifies all the elect people of God. And one great end of all scriptural study is, so to be acquainted with this blessed God, as to ascertain that he loved *you* with an everlasting love, that the Son has justified *you* by his blood, and that the Spirit has renewed *you* into the image of God. The scriptures do not conduct us to an airy, metaphy-

sical, speculative knowledge of the Deity; but to this one point, What is God to *me*? What has he done for *me*? Is this God *my* God?

When this is ascertained, what celestial bliss will flow from an acquaintance with his attributes. How often are they introduced in the scriptures, as they have been displayed on various occasions for the help and deliverance of his people, to inspire zeal, confidence, love, joy, dependence, humility, faith; those essential requisites to this intimacy! When God gave Abraham this command, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect," he prefaced it with this description of himself, "I am the Almighty God." And what an encouragement, to know that the God before whom he was walking was El Shaddai, God Almighty, God all-bountiful, God all-sufficient, as the original imports. And how sweet for you, beloved, in weakness, and difficulty, and fear, to be acquainted with this attribute of your heavenly Father, who spake the world into existence out of nothing; who divided the sea, even the Red sea, and made a way for his ransomed to pass over; who

delivered David out of the paw of the lion and bear; who shut the mouths of rapacious lions, to save Daniel; who holds the winds in his fists, and the waters in the hollow of his hand; who can make a way for your escape from temptation, that you may be able to bear it; who is able to keep you from falling, able to bruise Satan under your feet, able to preserve you to his heavenly kingdom, and to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think. A believing view of this attribute in all your trials, will make you sing Luther's psalm in Luther's spirit: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Here you must take up your home, if you would be acquainted with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He set his love upon me, not because I was

worthy, but because he would love me: he commendeth his love towards me, whilst I was yet a sinner; in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed me, and bare me, and carried me all my days. O what manner of love has the Father bestowed upon me! upon *me!* that I should be called a child of God! And he will rest in his love: though he visit my iniquities with stripes, yet his loving kindness he will not take from me. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And with this persuasion, friends may forsake you, foes may threaten you, children may disappoint you; but this love shall be a house of defence to save you, in which you shall sing,

His love in times past forbids me to think.
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure to bring me quite through.

Jacob was reproved for a want of acquaintance with the extent of God's wisdom. "How sayest thou, O Jacob, my way is hid from the Lord?" Because it was dark to him, he thought it must be dark to his God: but he was taught a truth necessary for you intimately to know, to preserve you from the same error. "There is no searching of his understanding." O how blessed will it make your life, to be able to say, All my concerns, for time and eternity, are in the hands of my God, who has abounded to me in all wisdom and prudence. He knows my frame, and remembers that I am dust; the connexion between my soul and body, and how my nervous system affects my mental energies; he knows the law in my members warring against the law of my mind, the struggles I have to be free, my longing desires to be conformed to the image of Christ, to have done with sin and the world, and to have the wings of a dove, that I might fly away, and be at rest. He knows my family cares, and domestic trials, and bodily sufferings; how to provide for the fatherless and the widow; how to dispose of my

family, and supply my children in future days; how to make all things work together for my good, and to bring me by a right way to a city of habitation. If these thoughts of his wisdom are precious to you, you shall not hesitate in any affliction to say, "I will trust, and not be affraid. He will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and lead them in paths that they have not known. He will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will he do unto *me*, and not forsake me."

And equal consolation will flow from a knowledge of his omnipresence. Whether I am at home or abroad; banished from my father's house, a captive in a strange family; driven to seek my bread in a way I least expected; settled far away from the society I love and the house of the Lord; yet I carry my God with me. The union which subsists between us through Christ, no distance can dissolve. I hear him say, and I believe him, "I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the

spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." To say, "*Thou art with me,*" shall comfort me, when I hear the village bells, but cannot, through affliction, enter thy sanctuary, and appear before God. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *thou art with me*; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

And he is faithful, unchangeable, "without variableness, or shadow of a turning." He is God, and cannot lie; the subject of no guilty passions or malicious temper. His promises "are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus," and every promise of spiritual health, of deliverance from wrath, of temporal supplies and guidance to glory, has been confirmed by oath, that we might have strong consolation. Oh what a rock is this, amidst the fluctuations of our own feelings, the vacillation of friends, and the variation of circumstances, "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Yea, the justice, holiness, righteousness, and goodness of God, are all favourable to you, and full of holy consolation, if you have come to God through

his Son. These attributes, may you say, are mine through Christ, and on my side. Searching the scriptures, where he is revealed in his glory, shall increase your faith, and enable you to add, "This God is my God for ever and ever, he shall be my guide even unto death."

A further means of becoming acquainted with a person is,

FREQUENT PRIVATE CONVERSE.

We must dwell with those whom we would thoroughly know. Personal private communion, especially if often repeated, will sooner introduce us to the knowledge of a character than any other mode with which we are acquainted. And be it known unto you, there will be little disposition to use the other methods to gain acquaintance with God, unless you are often in company with him. This private converse is made up of prayer,—meditation,—and holy walking with God. And let me for a while press these things upon you.

1. Of Prayer.

There are many who think it quite enough

to visit God morning and evening; nay, it can hardly be called a visit to God, a mere hurried repetition of an oft-repeated prayer, to satisfy conscience, but not to commune with God. Others esteem it quite enough to pray in some strait or difficulty, when no one else can help them. "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." "When he slew them then they sought him, they returned and inquired early after God." Such persons make God their refuge, not their choice. He would not see their faces, but they are driven by necessity to ask his deliverance. Now though the Lord never turns a deaf ear to prayer, come when it will, yet he who only visits his throne in a season of suffering, and he who thinks morning and evening enough, will find this is not God's way of acquainting a soul intimately with himself. Every new providence, fresh want, unlawful desire, and additional mercy, should be but messengers to give us new errands to the throne of grace. And he shall be well acquainted with God, who turns them to so good

an account. Afflictions shall sit light upon his heart, and peace dwell in his bosom. But the communion that God loves, and will bless with a large acquaintance with himself, is that which arises from love to him; a return of his love to us; such love as we have for a dear friend, which draws us often into his presence, not because we have any particular message, or want any special favour, but because we delight in his society. And thus to come to God, when we are not pressed with fears, nor pinched with doubts, nor vexed with cares, but because we love the light of his countenance, because his favour to us is life, and we cannot be happy without him, this is the communion which shall be rewarded with a large knowledge of his character, and an intimate acquaintance with him.

O be entreated to cultivate this blessed life! It is not always being on your knees, but having the heart spiritually disposed, sitting all the day long in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. He commands you to pray always; and he sets his door open, and welcomes you as a visitor

whenever you are disposed to enter. Why are we bashful and diffident of our heavenly Father's presence? Why are we not breathing the atmosphere of heaven, like the Abarimonites, of whom it is said that they could breathe no air but that of their native country; and drawing down the dewy influences of grace upon our spirits? Why do we not open our mouths wide, that he may fill them with his goodness, which he has provided for the poor; and put ourselves in the situation in which his secret may be with us, and he may shew us his covenant?

Such general communion with him will give us greater boldness in the day of affliction, to cast all our cares upon him, knowing that he careth for us. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Indeed, afflictions are frequently sent to wind up our affections to a holy pitch of importunity, to bring us the oftener into his presence, and make us stay longer when we are there. We complain in prosperity, that we have not time to serve and enjoy him as we could wish; and he, in mercy to our souls,

gives us the time we want by confining us to our chamber for a few weeks or months, and disengages our thoughts from the world by disappointing our favourite schemes. We should not have read of Jacob's princely spirit and mighty conquest, or of his spending the whole night in prayer, but for Jacob's affliction.

If God has not yet manifested himself to you as he does to his people, and if the burden of guilt and sorrow lies heavy upon your conscience, do not despair, beloved. Continue knocking, for to him that knocketh it is opened. This is the infallible method of gaining his friendship. It is obedience to his own command: when thou saidst, "Seek ye my face," my heart said unto thee, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Therefore if he close the door of his chamber, it is not to keep you out, but to teach you to knock the louder. If he cover himself with a cloud that your prayer cannot pass through, it is only that the vehemence of the breath of prayer should waft this cloud away, and give you the sunshine of his countenance. If he seem to depart the further from you, it

is only to provoke you to follow him, or implore him more frequently to continue with you; as Luke reports of the Saviour, when he arrived at Emmaus, "He made as though he would have gone further; but the disciples *constrained him, saying, Abide with us.*" And such was his conduct to the poor Syrophenician woman. She came to him in great family distress; her daughter being grievously afflicted with a devil. Her manner of address shews how deeply she felt her child's calamity. "Have mercy on *me*, O Lord, thou Son of David." The circumstances were such as to induce any compassionate heart to afford immediate condolence or help. Here is a woman, a mother; a woman in distress, in distress about her daughter; one whom no one could relieve but himself: yet he answered her not a word. She however continued her plea, till the disciples, either in pity for her condition, or troubled by her repeated entreaties, "came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us." He then condescended to answer her; but the answer was apparently more repulsive

than his silence, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He raised a fence around the lost sheep of Israel as his fold, but seems to exclude her entirely from their privileges. And does not this silence her? No; determined to affect his heart with her destitute condition, if she had no claim to his bounty, she again cried, "Lord, help me." It is true I am not within the pale of thy commission; I cannot boast of the lineage of David; but my misery is great, my situation is most afflicting; "Lord, help me." Apparently unmoved by her entreaties, he repulsed her again, by reminding her of her own unworthiness. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." Is she not now offended? will she persevere still? Yes; and faith is wonderfully ingenious. Like the philosopher's stone, it turns all things into gold; it sees love in the heart of Jesus when frowns are in his countenance, and converts the greatest difficulties into arguments for relief. "Truth, Lord," said this humbled woman, I am as a dog, unentitled to the privilege of a child's place

at the table, or the child's food: thou canst not say any thing worse of thine handmaid than she feels herself to be: yet even the dogs have a privilege, and that privilege only I claim; "the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." O let a crumb of mercy fall to me. Now hear the reply of Jesus. He could oppose her no longer; the end was answered; and now he softens his voice to admiration: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." So shall it be with you. Let nothing intimidate you. "Clouds and darkness are round about him, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Bear the indignation of the Lord, because you have sinned against him; but cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. You deserve his frown; wait for his smile. He smites you, but it is for your advantage; and who would not bear correction from such a hand? When Diogenes went to Athens, Antisthenes, the philosopher, at first refused to admit him into his house, and even struck him with a stick to drive him away.

But Diogenes calmly bore the rebuke, and said, "Strike me, Antisthenes; but never shall you find a stick sufficiently hard to remove me from your presence, while there is any information to be gained from your acquaintance." This firmness recommended him to Antisthenes, and he became his most devoted pupil. And the Master whose acquaintance you seek, has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

2. Of Meditation.

Holy meditation is the musing of the heart on spiritual subjects, the soul's inward converse and soliloquy with God: the intellectual eye examining and pondering over the excellencies and suitableness of a covenant God, in all his offices and characters, and in reference to all the conditions in which the soul can be placed. David improved and heightened his acquaintance by this heavenly conference. At day-break, he says, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I

awake, I am still with thee." Amidst the multiplied cares and troubles of government, his thoughts were first with him in the morning. He had a room swept and garnished, to welcome this blessed friend. In the day-time, he says, "My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord." Whatever bitters there were in David's cup, or whatever sorrows from his family or his enemies, there was an immeasurable sweetness in turning his thoughts to a covenant God; in setting up way-marks of his providence; and musing on his abiding love. At night, he says, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches." God's excellencies were his soul's food. Meditation nourished him when in the wilderness, where he could not see the divine power and glory as he had seen them in the sanctuary. It not only brought necessary food, but a royal feast; all manner of the richest spiritual dainties, marrow and *fatness*; it made waters break out in the wil-

derness, spread a table in the midst of his enemies, and introduced the Lord as his guest. Such was the benefit he derived from the exercise, that he invites you to join him; "O taste, and see that the Lord is good!" You may see that the Lord is good: but as by tasting we discover the excellency of a thing, and long for more, so this tasting that the Lord is gracious shall be like Jonathan's tasting the honey; it will enlighten your eyes to a greater acquaintance with him. It is the turning of his precious promises and characters into food, that increases the spiritual appetite.

Though there may be some special season of leisure and quietude chosen for mediation with great advantage, as Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide; what I principally urge is, that you should learn the heavenly use of earthly things; that you should find heaven and God in every thing, that your business, your work, and your pleasure, should be channels in which the stream of this acquaintance may perpetually flow; that it should become natural to you; that as your life is hid

with Christ in God, you may live in spirituality as the fish lives in the water, or the bird in the air, their natural and appropriate elements.

Every work of creation, held in the hand of faith, will be as a telescope through which you may see the Creator. The earth in its variety; the sea in its expansion and wonders; the heavens in their glories; the seasons in their order; winter in its severity; spring in its fertility; summer in its beauty; and autumn in its abundance; were subjects which afforded David, and will always afford you, themes enough for admiration and praise. But redeeming love was his darling subject. His fingers never struck such enchanting notes upon his harp, as when it was tuned to Messiah's praise. And what cause is there not for delight in meditating on him who has loved you, and given himself for you? When the wife, father, and friends of Tigranes, were taken prisoners by Cyrus, he came from his home to redeem them; and being asked by Cyrus what ransom he would give for his wife, he answered, I will redeem her with my own life. Cyrus, pleased

with the reply, immediately let her go free. As they were returning home, Tigranes asked her what she thought of Cyrus. Indeed, said she, I did not look at him, or think about him. Whom then did you look upon? asked her astonished husband. Whom should I look upon, or think of, but him that would have redeemed my life with his own? And, O beloved, whom should you meditate on, but him that *did* redeem your life with his own? What kind of entertainment has the world ever given you, worthy to draw your thoughts from heavenly joys? Are you not a pilgrim and a stranger? How unseemly then that this world should be the settled place of your mind, your habitation to which you continually resort! Say with David, from this day, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

Do not object that you have no time or ability for this. All you want is an increase of love to him, to make you meditate upon him more largely. How naturally do our minds revert to objects we love! How welcome are

they always to our thoughts! We seek a place to weep when we are separated from them; we retire from company to write to them; we think of their excellencies on our beds and in our walks; we dwell upon the delights their society and love have afforded, and long for the day and hour when we shall meet again. And yet we never complain that they occupy too much of our time. Have not those moments, disconsolate widow, been your sweetest, when you could relieve the desolateness of your situation by looking back on the kindness, and care, and tenderness of him whose body you have committed to the tomb? And has it not alleviated the loss of that beloved child, to dwell on the blessed symptoms of grace in his heart, his filial love, and the hope of meeting him in glory? While these have moved your tears, you have tasted a pleasure unknown to any but a mother and a widow. And why do we not thus with Christ? Why is he like a stranger and a way-faring man, that tarrieth but for a night in our hearts, which should be his home? Is it not a wonder that he will give you permission to love

him; that he will condescend to keep a book of remembrance when you think on his name; that he waits to be gracious to you, knocks at your door, and asks you to let him come in to sup with you; and that he is not ashamed to be called your God? O unspeakable love! O wonderful compassion! Should not these considerations awake you to meditate on him who thus loves you? "He will command his loving-kindness in the day-time" for your sake. Go forth, my loving-kindness; I commission thee to settle, like a dove, upon that fearful, humble, broken heart: warm it, expand it, soften it, and bring it back again on thy wings to me. And will not you command your thoughts to receive this heavenly messenger, to indulge these blessed intimations of the Spirit, and ascend to your Father and your God?

3. Of holy walking with God.

By this I mean obedience to his precepts, and delight in his ways. Walking implies life, exertion, perseverance, and progress; being born again, and having the eye looking forward, and the eyelids straight before us. It does not con-

sist in a rapturous enjoyment now and then; a satisfaction of interest in the covenant of grace; or some heavenly meditation once a year; but a regular, habitual, persevering course of obedience to his commands. There must be a disposition first to say, with David, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way;" and then a conduct corresponding: "My soul hath kept thy testimonies, for I love them exceedingly." It will not do to boast of attachment to Christ, and to live in the wilful neglect of his known commands; to say that his love constrains you to live to him that died for you and rose again, and to give your lusts the reins of government. Your soul requires a watchful superintendence, a vigorous resisting unto blood, striving against sin, a taking heed to your way according to God's word; a constant self-examination to see how matters stand between yourself and God; for without this, acquaintance will be suspended. You know how little sin and righteousness can agree. God will not walk with you till you come back into his path. The world

requires this. You must have a good report of them that are without, that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. The world will otherwise give you no credit for religion it does not *see* in you. It looks for fruit, as well as talk. The eloquence of a blameless life, will more effectually plead for you than all other arguments in favour of christianity. It is the eloquence of fact, which is the most difficult to resist. You are a city set on a hill, and cannot be hid. You are the salt of the earth, and should not lose your savour. You are a peculiar people, to be zealous of good works; a people formed for himself, to shew forth his praise; and you are to "let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." Abraham was the friend of God, and thus he walked; he obeyed God, believed God, kept the charge of God, and rejoiced to see the day of his Christ. It is a short but comprehensive character given of Enoch; he walked with God, and was not, for God took him. As one observes, God and

Enoch were like two familiar friends, who walked in company without dispute. He was so taken up with God, that God took him from all acquaintance with man, by translating him that he should not taste of death. He was before translated from nature to grace, and proved so great a proficient in that school, that he was translated from grace to glory.

But above all, remember how the Saviour walked, leaving you an example that you should tread in his steps. Are you a child? Do you love your mother? If not, go and learn it at the cross. The excruciating pains of such a death could not make him forget his mother. She was a poor woman, and love prompted him to leave her in charge of his beloved disciple, who, he knew, would take care of her. Woman, said he, behold thy Son; and to John, Son, behold thy mother: and from that time the disciple took her to his own home. O, children, love your mothers! I have hardly ever known a child prosper who did not love his parents. Let the same humble mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made himself of no

reputation. Employ your time, and talents, and property, as he did, in healing the broken hearted, visiting the sick, and relieving the fatherless and widow. Regulate your temper by his, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. In all things set your life, as a watch by the dial, in agreement with the Sun of Righteousness, and it shall never be wrong.

Those who thus honour God, he will honour; they shall not only be walkers, but workers together with God; the greatest helpers of his cause in the world.

No big words of ready talkers,
No dry doctrines, will suffice;
Contrite hearts, and upright walkers,
These are dear in Jesus' eyes.

For, saith he, "If a man love me he will keep my words;" and what shall be the consequence? "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEST SEASON FOR COMMENCING ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

“PROCRASTINATION is the thief of time.” Delays are always dangerous, and in soul affairs cruel, and productive of the greatest mischief. And yet Satan has not a more powerful temptation, to young or old, than procrastination; persuading us that we shall be in a better condition, and a happier frame, and more decided for God, to-morrow than to-day, next year than this. Alas! how often has he cheated you with a may-be for a certainty, and made you put off a present season, a golden opportunity of profit and advantage, for some uncertain and unlikely gain. Beloved, the intention of this blessed advice is to move you, by the consideration of the value of the present moment, to seek, and to

seek immediately, a more intimate acquaintance with God, which shall prove fatal to Satan's power over you, and open a source of unspeakable blessedness to your spirit. Take these thoughts for your guide.

COMMENCE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD NOW, FOR THESE ARE THE VERY BEST DAYS FOR THE PURPOSE YOU EVER WILL SEE.

Youth is the most valuable and suitable time for gaining an acquaintance with God. It is the very prime of life. Now your memory is strong, your health good, your mind vigorous. This then is the time when God claims, and ought to have your acquaintance. The morning of your days, and the first-born of your strength, are surely his, by every tie of duty and of love. And this is the particular time he asks you to begin this acquaintance: "Remember *now* thy Creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." No time is ours but the present. The

future is wisely concealed from our view, that we may improve every moment as we have it. The scripture, therefore, uses but one word, "Now," or its equivalent, "To-day," when speaking of the time of mercy: "*Now* is the accepted time, *to-day* is the day of salvation." All its invitations are for the present moment. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, *To-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Come, for all things are *now* ready. Son, go work *to-day* in my vineyard. Choose you *this day* whom you will serve." All its promises are made for the same period, as well as for the future. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that *now* is, and of that which is to come. The hour cometh, and *now is*, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth. *To-day* do I declare that I will render double unto thee. From *this day* will I bless you. That he may establish thee *to-day* for a people to himself, and that he may be a God to thee, as he said unto thee." Its prayers lead to the same period. "Give us *this day* our daily

bread. Save *now*, O Lord; I beseech thee, send *now* prosperity."

And these exhortations and promises are consistent with God's general conduct to you. He daily loadeth you with his benefits; his mercies are new every morning and every evening. They are consistent with the Saviour's love. He spent the morning of his days in redeeming you. They are consistent with your own conduct in the world. If you were in extreme want, and a person left a note at your house, containing a promise to provide largely for you, and inviting you to his friendship, you would think every moment too precious to be lost, until you had made his acquaintance. How differently do you act for eternity! You know that without a present acquaintance with the friend of sinners you must be miserable here, and perish eternally; and yet the day is put off, as if it were of no importance whether you are saved or lost. You say, I see no reason for severing myself from the world yet: my judgment is not yet matured; my opinions are not fixed; it will be time enough for me by and by. Is not the

young man told to rejoice in his youth, and to let his heart cheer him in the days of his youth? Yes; only go on with your quotation: "but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment." Consider with yourself at what time, if not at present, you determine to commence acquaintance with God? Can you secure to-morrow as your own? Do you hold your life upon a less precarious tenure than that friend who fell yesterday by apoplexy, or that neighbour who was suddenly seized with a spasm and died? Will you strive to be acquainted with him when you reach your seventieth year; when your eyes grow dim, and your limbs tremble, and your taste for worldly pleasures is over? When you can no longer enjoy the world, then God may have your time. Is this your kindness to your friend? Young man, hearken to the voice of God: "Consecrate yourselves *to-day* to the Lord; that he may bestow upon you a blessing *this day*." And suffer me, my beloved young friends, lest Satan should get an advantage over you, (for I fear lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve, so your

mind should be beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ,) suffer me yet further to plead with you for my Master, to begin an acquaintance with him. Give no heed to the suggestion of the enemy of souls, that you are not fit for heavenly society, but presently may overcome your sins, and be better qualified. Now be it ever remembered, that you are not invited to Christ because you are fit, but to make you so; not because you are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," but because you are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" in order to buy of him gold tried in the fire, and white raiment that you may be clothed, and to anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see; and all without money and without price.

Dear reader, it is probable you have been the burden of your minister's daily prayers, and the hope of his future years. Occasionally, when mercies have excited, or terrors alarmed your feelings, has he indulged the hope that you had come to God through Christ; but, his hopes were visionary. The fear of presump-

tion has kept you back. Well, are you willing *now* to become the associate, the friend of God? Do you feel your heart melt at the recollection of his kindness and forbearance towards you? Let me then, this moment conduct you to the great Intercessor. Give him the hand of your faith, and he shall introduce you this day to his most gracious Majesty. Does your heart say,

Now, Lord, I would be wholly thine,
And wholly live to thee:
But may I hope that thou wilt own
A worthless worm like me?

Take an answer in his own words, and place it against all your fears, and sins, and unfitness: "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me."

And let me not forget that this idea is equally applicable to you, my beloved, who know and love God. "Acquaint *now* thyself with him." You will never have a better day nor a better hour than the present, for this purpose. Do not think that when you have left off business, when your family is grown up, when your in-

come is increased, when your cares are lessened, that then you will apply yourself to know more of God. I never knew the man that put off of growing acquaintance with God till these times arrived, who made much progress when they came. And the reason is evident. You know not what a day may bring forth. A thousand unknown trials in the family, cares of an unexpected kind, losses unconnected with business, and, above all, a total disrelish for the things of God, may accompany this paradise of pleasure and ease you are picturing to yourselves. It is very erroneous to suppose that having much time on our hands will necessarily bring a devotional spirit: the contrary is generally the case. When persons have little to do, they think any time but the present the best; they defer their meetings with God till by and by, as they have no engagements; and the consequence is that many unexpected hinderances meet them, and they never retire at all, except just before they enter their beds, when they are generally very much fatigued with doing nothing. Whereas a person fully employed, if

he be spiritually minded, will say, I know my engagements will take up the greater portion of this day: if I do not secure these first moments for God, I shall feel greater difficulty to retire hereafter, or it will be impossible. If there be a willing mind, there will be seldom much difficulty. A man will learn how to economize his time, to rise a little earlier, and form a plan to regulate his household. Is not your irregularity the cause of your want of time? I feel convinced this was the method by which the old worthies obtained the time they gave to the Lord. David was a king, and more engaged than you or I, and yet he found time to walk within his house with a perfect heart, and at morning, and evening, and noon, to pray, and cry aloud. Abraham was a man of most extensive business, who had three hundred and eighteen trained servants born in his own house, and yet he found time to command his household, and walk himself before God. Joshua had the command of six hundred thousand men, yet he and his house would serve the Lord. O you had better lose a little

of your daily gain than the advantages of acquaintance with God. You will reap greater profits eventually from shutting your doors two hours in a day against the world, than by suffering the world to turn God out of your house. Your exalted privilege is to have the enjoyment of divine things *now*; and *now* to manifest to all around what the grace of God has done for you. "There is therefore *now* no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus—who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. *Now* being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." And therefore, *now*, while the world surrounds you with cares, and your family with anxiety, and your business takes up much, very much, of your time; *now* carry on this acquaintance with the greater vigour. Let the world and your family be benefited by it. Come among them, as Moses came from the mount of God, with your face shining through heavenly communion: let every day be a Sabbath, and every visit to the throne of grace a sacrament. "Take heed, brethren, lest

there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called *To-day*; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

2. COMMENCE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD NOW, BECAUSE YOUR FORMER LIFE HAS BEEN A LIFE OF COMPARATIVE IGNORANCE.

It may be that you are not ignorant of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel; and that you have been well educated, by means of catechisms and parental admonitions; but has this amounted yet to any thing more than theory? Have you ever closed with Christ? Have you ever diligently, prayerfully, and earnestly, like one who felt its value, sought an interest in and communion with this precious Saviour? And if this has not taken place, how much preferable is your religion to Balaam's? "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh." Few had more exalted conceptions of the Mes-

siah than he, and yet all his religious knowledge amounted to this, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his:" not a word about living the life of the righteous. His acquaintance with Christ was to be future; "not now." And if your religious knowledge of Jesus has not produced the practical effect of making you desirous of knowing, loving, and serving God, am I not justified in saying, that to this day it has been a life of ignorance? And here I address myself particularly to the children of pious parents. What is the reason we so often see you, who ought to be treading in the steps of godly parents, avoiding the path of life, and passing it by, not only neglectful, but vile? Is not this the reason: that, content with the knowledge of the way to heaven, you do not seek the influences of the holy Spirit to cause you to walk in it? You will not come to Jesus that you might have life? When have you pleaded that promise made to your parents: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon

thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel?" Or that covenant declaration, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee?" These are precious promises, which your parents have rejoiced in on your behalf; which have comforted their disconsolate hearts, and revived their hopes; that yet, even yet, their mocking and careless Ishmaels, might live before God. And these are your promises, yes, your promises, my dearly beloved young people, which God is willing to fulfil on your behalf. And until they are fulfilled, your life will be an ignorant life;—for though you spake with the tongues of men and of angels, and though you had the gift of prophecy, and understood all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though you had all faith, so that you could remove mountains; and though you bestowed all your goods to feed the poor, and though you gave your

body to be burned, and had not love to God, it would profit you nothing. O may the holy Spirit induce you to cry, "He is my God, I will prepare him an habitation; my Father's God, and I will exalt him."

Nor is this confined to those who are far from God, but it extends to you, beloved, who serve him. Happy indeed is the people whose God is the Lord, however little they know of him; who have escaped the pollutions of the world, and have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel. But which of you must not say, How little do I know of him! How very little of my precious time has been given, to gain larger measures of his grace, and greater portions of his Spirit! How little do I know of his covenant, his promises, his work, his love! How many, who set out after me, have passed me long ago; know him more, love him more, serve him more, than I do! From this ignorance arise unbelief of his word, murmurings at his providence, jealousies of his government, hard thoughts of his conduct, carelessness of divine communion, and disobedience to his commands.

And is this not the time to begin again? Is it not high time to awake out of sleep, seeing that now is our salvation nearer than when we believed? that now, "when, for the time we ought to have been teachers, we need that some one teach us, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat?" My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Do not, like many, be content with merely escaping hell. Let not your salvation remain uncertain, but give all diligence to make your calling and election sure; to attain the full assurance of hope, and to know whom you have believed. Set about this work in earnest, encouraging your hearts with this assurance, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the former and the latter rain upon the earth."

2. COMMENCE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD NOW, WHILE YOU SEE NUMBERS OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS DISHONOURING HIM.

That is the time to be more devoted to our friend, when we see others desert him. Many young people would turn this into an argument for shunning God, because many who profess to be christians laugh at communion with him, and account heavenly meditation and prayer fanaticism and folly. "Shew thyself a man," said David to Solomon, on his dying bed. How? By boasting the superiority of reason; by rejecting revelation; or by refusing the yoke of Christ, and living in the indulgence of unbridled passions? O no! "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself." True courage, and the highest reason, are so to live that men can bring no greater charge against you than Daniel's enemies did against him. "We shall find no occasion against Daniel, except we find it

against him concerning the law of his God." O be not led away with the error of the wicked! It is a truth confirmed by daily experience, of which I take you to record this day, that "the wages of sin is death." You have witnessed the misery and death which a life of ungodliness purchases. I charge you not to forget this; "The end of these things is death." Daniel charged this as the great crime upon Belshazzar, that he forgot "the punishment of his father, who was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, *though thou knewest all this.*" And while you see others turning their backs upon God, and disdaining his friendship, will ye also go away? Will you join league with the wicked against him? While he is knocking at the door of your heart by the ministry of his word, will

you bribe conscience to say you are too much engaged, and cannot open to him? That be far from you. Acquaint thyself now with him, and be at peace.

And does not this very consideration move you, believer, to commence a greater intimacy with God? See how he is wounded in the house of his friends! Demas and Judas, Alexander and Diotrophes, still live in the persons of many professed disciples. What conformity to the world, what indecision of character, what low morality, what indulgence of the flesh, what stretches of christian liberty, do many manifest! You say the fear of singularity operates very much against your decision of character. But what dread, my beloved, should you feel to be singularly good; to have God for your friend; the holy angels for your ministering spirits; Christ for your Saviour; and heaven for your home? Shall the fear of being accounted singular by those whose good opinion is not worth having, induce you to suffer Satan to take unmolested possession of your soul? Did ever holy, wise, virtuous, heavenly-minded men, rank

those with fools who sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Will not the enemies of God rather envy than blame your singularity at the day of judgment? Will it be any gratification in hell, to reflect that you came there by not being singular; that you followed the customs and maxims of great and ungodly men, and will have them for your companions for ever? Will you destroy your soul for company's sake? Is it not dreadful to think, that you are bartering away that invaluable jewel, for the short-lived applause of your fellow sinners? Like the rulers who believed on him, but were afraid to confess him, lest they should be turned out of the synagogue, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. O think of the worth of your precious soul! What should it profit you, if you should gain the whole world, and lose your own soul? Beloved, seek not the praise of men. Dare to be singularly good. Regard not the opinion of half-hearted professors. In a very little time, it will be of small importance to you whether the world hated or loved you. Ask yourselves

what does the word of God say, and then stand to that, against all the expedients, accommodations, and worldly schemes of men. And this is his word: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: the friendship of the world is enmity with God." Do what you may to reconcile them, God and the world will never coalesce: balls, and theatres, and card parties, are utterly irreconcilable with a healthy state of mind, and communion with God. To be one day in God's house, and another in the theatre; one time drinking the cup of salvation, and another the cup of the drunkard; this evening filling your mouth with the praises of Christ, and to-morrow singing to the praises of Cupid; now associating with the saints, then walking with, and as, the ungodly; is but the life of many professors. The circle of their conduct forms the face of a barometer; on its dial-plate are engraved, in legible characters, on one side, "for God," on the other, "for the world:" the hand that points to these characters is covetousness, and the mercury that moves it is temporal interest. If this moving

principle change the position of this hand to God, God they follow; if to the world, the world they follow: but its daily position is between both. Do not therefore listen for a moment to the ensnaring plea of many, that you will injure the cause by your exactness; that if you will concede a little you may win the ungodly; or that by union with such a person you may save their souls from death. By going half way to meet them, they may take you a long distance on their road; but not one inch of your path will they tread, till they are made willing in the day of God's power. Be decided for God, and they will admire your consistency, while they hate you. Use all scriptural methods for their conversion; but diverge not from the straight path of duty, whatever be your temptations, or threatenings, or persecutions, knowing that "if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Have that faith, my

brethren, which overcomes the world. Live but in heaven, and you may defy it, as the three children did Nebuchadnezzar: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter; but if it be so," if we are to lose thy favour, and the good word of all the world, "we know that our God is able to beliver us." You chose him, beloved, as your *single* inheritance. You entered Christ's service upon these conditions: "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily, and follow me." Study not then to rid yourself of that cross. Let it be your glory. Be not ashamed of him. Be not ashamed of his words. Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. Put shame on sin, but never let it be appended to the Saviour's perfect righteousness and blessed society. "Put on therefore," every morning you rise, and wear every day you live, "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. For I heard a voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her plagues."

4. COMMENCE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD NOW, BECAUSE NOW HE INVITES YOU TO HIS ACQUAINTANCE.

Methinks I hear your thoughts: Well, if I could but be assured that God would welcome me, and had actually given me an invitation, then I could approach him without fear; but no one knows my sinfulness. O how my guilt rises up before my mind. Can God receive such an unworthy creature as I am into his friendship? You may well wonder at such love; but you shall see that all the unwillingness to divine communion is on your part, not on his. Are you a backslider, who has departed from his ways in heart, if not in life, and sinned both against knowledge and love? Well: he would heal the breach this day. He stretches out the hand of friendship to you, and in accents of love and fidelity says, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our

lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him." Are you in great darkness of mind, saying, "O that I knew where I might find him. I would go even to his seat?" To you this invitation is expressly sent: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart." And you, my beloved young friend, whose parents long to see your heart given up to Christ, and are praying day and night for your salvation, behold a promise to you full of strong affection; read it, and be amazed. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." And to you, O sinner, who have never trodden in his paths, nor ever courted, but shunned his acquaintance; you

who have had so many mercies, so many warnings, so many narrow escapes from death, and made so many vows; "Come *now*, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." If you still think I have not specified your character, take this summary invitation. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Honour him by believing his word. Set it down in your minds that he is faithful, that he means what he says. Put him to the test, and you shall know he does not mock you. Believe not the men of the world, nor your heart, when they tell you it is all enthusiasm. Make the trial for yourself; for there is no reason why you should not acquaint yourself now with him, and be at peace, that good may come unto you.

Retreat beneath his wings,
And in his grace confide;
This more exalts the King of kings
Than all your works beside.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

THE advantages are suggested by two expressions, in the passage at the commencement of this volume; "Be at peace:" and, "good shall come unto thee." The first of these may be read either as an injunction or a promise. "Be at peace:" that is, lay down the weapons of your unlawful warfare, and become friends. You are now fighting against God, and can know no quietude in such a battle. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked: they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." No sinner can have peace with God, but by embracing his Son, whom he has set upon his holy hill of Zion; for he is our peace. Nor until then can he have any peace

in his conscience; he is necessarily subject to alarms. And if he is actually undisturbed, it is a false peace, built on a treacherous foundation; "as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that sleepeth upon the top of a mast." Though he may fancy himself secure, he is not safe. The meaning therefore is, Fall in with God's terms. Cease your opposition to his plan of mercy, and be at peace.

The phrase, however, implies much more. It imports that peace is the happy result and blessed effect of the course enjoined. Acquaintance with God and peace with God, are two links in one chain, inseparably connected. You cannot possess the one without the other. By this acquaintance then, you shall have,

1. A DELIGHTFUL FREEDOM FROM THE ACCUSATIONS OF CONSCIENCE.

He that has been convinced of his condition by the Spirit of God, and has seen by the law of God the dreadful punishment to which he has been exposed, knows something of the pangs of an accusing conscience.

How sweet is deliverance from such tormenting bondage! How blessed is that man who feels himself released from the law as a covenant of works; walking at large without his prison fetters; no longer having the sentence of condemnation sounding in his ears, nor the prospect of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord before his eyes; but holding in his hand the title-deed of a glorious inheritance; having within an earnest of a paradise more beautiful, fragrant, and durable, than the fabled gardens of Adonis; one that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him. He is no longer the King's prisoner, but the King's son, with liberty to dwell in his palace, sit at his table, partake of his embraces, and be made fully like him. For that same spirit, which was before tossed with tempests, and not comforted, having the billows of his wrath going over it, and the arrows of the Almighty sticking fast in it, the poison whereof drank it up, now to hear, "Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord, and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold I have taken

out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury. Thou shalt no more drink it again!" Surely this is peace indeed.

And this, my beloved, shall be the advantage of your growing acquaintance with God. You shall see Jesus made of God unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. You shall see your sins forgiven through his blood. You shall see the covenant of peace ratified and concluded in his death. You shall see his perfect and everlasting righteousness securing your present peace, against the accusations of Satan, the rigours of the law, and the demands of the justice of God; and forming your entire justification before him. You shall see God loving you, and well pleased with you through his Son. And what are all the wealth, and gaiety, and honours of the world, to such inward tranquillity as this?

The result of acquaintance with God is not merely to give you a knowledge of these things, but, by being constantly in his presence, to maintain the holy savour of them upon the heart; so that conscience shall be appeased

and cleared, and the mind kept free from unnecessary alarms. The main thing in the spiritual life is, to maintain the freshness of our deliverance; to feel as if we were released from bondage but yesterday; to have a lively recollection of our former misery; and to be sensible of the obligations under which we are laid to him "who brought us up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings; who hath put a new song in our mouth, even praise unto our God." And in this you will discover the difference between those who constantly walk with God, and those who neglect him. There will be a levity and indifference where the knowledge of these blessed truths is only in the head; like a person talking of the happiness of a man whom the king had graciously pardoned, but not experiencing the feelings of joy, love, and gratitude, which would flow spontaneously from the lips of the recipient of the royal bounty, if he were to tell us himself. The former cannot enter into the happiness of the latter. O it is daily seeing thyself no longer a debtor to God,

except to his sovereign grace; thy debt, thy whole debt, paid, and paid for ever, and the bond cancelled; that will bring a holy quietude to the mind. This the apostle thus expressed: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Acquaintance with God will give you,

2. A HOLY SERENITY OF MIND IN THE TROUBLES OF LIFE.

Not that you shall escape trouble, or have fewer trials than the ungodly. You are born to trouble; it is your birthright through sin. Nor will living to God lessen their number, for many are the afflictions of the righteous. Saints in all ages have found this a troublesome world. Their path has been filled with thorns. Their families, or relations, or circumstances, have been far from pleasant. And God may call you, like Job, to part with your children, and your property, and your health, and turn

your wife and friends against you, and leave you desolate and alone. But though acquaintance with God does not abridge troubles, it will quiet your soul under them. It will teach you *the source from whence they proceed*.

Faith in his love and care shall enable your spirit to ascend through the clouds which hang over your concerns on earth, and discover a cloudless sky beyond them, the Lord himself, your friend, sending and overruling them. Unless our minds are taken away from second causes, and fixed on the great first Cause, we shall know little of peace. We shall be blaming this person, and that circumstance, as the origin of our affliction; distracting our minds with censure and retribution; anger, malice, evil speaking, and discontent, will manifest themselves; and we shall be busily employed to disentangle our feet out of the net, instead of waiting and praying for deliverance from heaven. But an acquaintance with him, as our Father, who is in this affliction dealing with us as with sons, will subdue our minds to the sweetest submission. We shall say, The rod is

in my Father's hand, and my Father's name is LOVE. He loved me so as to purpose my salvation, and give his Son for me; to send his Spirit to renew my nature, and to promise me heaven; and shall I doubt that he loves me now, though he holds a scourge? No: "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." I know that if he had intended to destroy me, he would not have shewn me such things as these. All the agents of my sorrow are but the twigs of his rod, whatever their character may be. He is now striking me hard blows, blows which I feel at my very heart; but he saturates his rod with love; and the harder he strikes, the more love accompanies it; so that my wounds are healed by the same hand that inflicts them.

O how will such acquaintance with God hush the mind to peace! See what effect it produced in spirits of old time. David, as a father, was greatly afflicted. Absalom his son, a young man unequalled in Israel for beauty, and evidently a favourite with his parent, rebelled against him, attempting to deprive him both

of his throne and his life. When fleeing from his ungrateful child, another trouble met him, of a most grievous and unexpected kind. A venerable manⁿ fleeing from an ungodly child would excite pity in the bosom of most persons; but Shimei came out and cursed the broken-hearted father, saying, "Come out, come out, thou bloody man: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son; and behold thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. And then Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said unto the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." Now Abishai looked at second causes. He saw only Shimei cursing; he could discover nothing of the counsel, superintendence, and love of God, in all this affair, and therefore his soul was enraged against the offender: but David looked through Shimei to his God, who he knew loved him, and was then chastising him; and saw

Shimei only as an instrument to execute his purpose. This quieted his mind, and he replied, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said unto Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse: for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite good for his cursing this day."

On another occasion, when with rebukes the Lord had chastened him for iniquity, and made his beauty to consume away like a moth, how did he bear it? "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth:" why? "because thou didst it." And that cannot be wrong which thou dost; there must be a necessity for it, if thou hast done it. In the same spirit we see Eli receiving the intelligence of the death of his two sons; and two sons in the ministry; dignitaries

in the church; cut down in the midst of their work, and under the most awful circumstances. "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Perhaps few ever had such grievous and quickly succeeding calamities as Job. Wave after wave came rolling in upon him, till all that he had was swept away; and yet he did not utter one revengeful word against the Chaldeans and Sabeans, the lightning and the wind, which had destroyed and taken away his property and family. No: he discerns his heavenly Father's commission in their hands. This stays his murmuring, so that he can worship as composedly when ten children are destroyed, his whole fortune lost, and his future prospects blasted, as when prosperity abounded, and his sons and daughters surrounded him. "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged

God foolishly." He manifested in the affliction no stoical apathy and indifference; he felt it, and felt it severely; but he was quiet, that he might hear the rod, and him that had appointed it. The Lord never intends that we should be insensible to his rod. It would cease to be a rod, if we did not feel it. This would be to despise the chastening of the Lord, and is forbidden as much as fainting under it. And therefore the apostle does not censure the Hebrew strangers for heaviness through manifold temptations, but only raises two banks, one on either side, namely, the almighty power of God, and the electing love of God, that their sorrow might softly glide between them; like a peaceful and quiet river that never overflows its banks: or in other words, that the love of God, by which they were chosen, justified, called, and fitted for their inheritance, and the power of God, by which they were kept from the destructive effects of all their trials, unto salvation, were objects in which they should greatly rejoice, and which might more than counterbalance their weightiest sorrows.

u

O are you now in affliction, and possessing a rebellious, murmuring spirit; thinking that the Lord hath dealt hardly with you, in taking away the desire of your eyes with a stroke? Beloved, acquaint yourself *now* with him, and you shall be soon at peace, as calm and tranquil as a summer's evening. Why should not you hearken to him, rather than to the voice of a stranger? And this is his voice: obey it, and you shall be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself, as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

Acquaintance with God shall teach you *the end for which he sends your trials*.

Every affliction has an errand; and is sent to accomplish some special purpose. His general designs are to prevent, imbitter, and mortify sin, to quicken, improve, and cherish our graces; to make himself glorious in our eyes, by support and deliverance. But it may not always be our lot to discover quickly the peculiar reasons of our trial; it is only necessary to our

happiness that we should know in general that it is for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son, and these sorrows are parts of his plan to accomplish his purpose. O what a soul-quieting consideration is this ! All my trials God sends to make me like Christ. Folly is bound up in the heart of his child ; but his rod of correction is to drive it out, that I may be more prudent, like my Saviour ! Much pride inhabits my bosom ; this affliction is to burn it up, that I may be more humble, like the Lamb of God ! My soul cleaves to the dust, and is too much attached to earth ; but this heavy stroke is to divide me from it, and make me more heavenly-minded, like Jesus ! Now if we can discover that all things are working together for our good, and that the Lord has no end to answer but our blessedness, we shall never be disposed to murmur. We can well leave in such hands the especial reason of all his dispensations, till we arrive where he is ; for what we know not now, we shall know hereafter. The map of his providence will be laid

before us, and we shall then learn why we were led by such apparently opposite roads to bring us to a city of habitation. The picture of needlework is now on the wrong side, and appears all confused; but it shall then be turned, and the beauty of the colours, the harmony of the parts, and the correctness of the design, shall be as conspicuous as the roughness and indistinctness were before. Remember therefore, that the only thing you want to inspire the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and which keeps the mind, as in a fortress, against the storms of life, is acquaintance with God; to know him in his dispensations so well, that you can justify him in all the seemingly contradictory providences with which he visits you; or in extreme darkness of soul to say, "O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not, and in the night season I am not silent. But *thou art holy*, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." As if he should say, I cannot tell the reason why my prayers are not answered, and my soul is still in darkness; nevertheless, I cannot impeach his veracity, or love. He is

holy still. "Clouds and darkness are round about him, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." O this will dispose you calmly to bear his rebukes. Look at his design; and what you cannot comprehend, leave till the day when "the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried in the fire, shall be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ."

2

Acquaintance with God will inspire,

3. A SWEET SATISFACTION IN THE WHOLE
OF HIS WILL.

Your condition in life may differ from that of many whom you may be disposed occasionally to envy. Did you possess their opportunities, their talents, and their possessions, how happy you would be, and what good you would effect! But this is the result of carnal apprehensions of your Father which is in heaven. A greater acquaintance with him would rectify this mistake, so fatal to your peace. The election of your *state* is his prerogative, as well as that of your

person; and he has exercised it with as great wisdom and love. "Should it be according to thy mind?" If you reflect upon your experience, you must say, No, Lord: hadst thou given me the desires of my proud, discontented, ignorant heart, I have seen enough to convince me that I must have been ruined. How unreasonable then it is in you, a child, to wish to direct your Father! or that you, a servant, should aspire to command your Master! And are you not often doing this by your conduct? You think it right that God should exalt those whom you prefer, and punish those whom you dislike. You would rather have had that child spared which he chose to take, than all your family beside. You think that your afflictions are unsuitable; that you could better bear almost any trial than this; any cross than this; that if they were shorter and lighter, they would better suit your condition and weakness. What arrogance is it to suppose that we could order our affairs better for ourselves, than he could for us! What sin and folly are connected with such a spirit! And O what misery! The mind in such a state

is very far from peace. How desirable then is acquaintance with God! This inspires a sweet satisfaction in his will, and a holy contentment with our lot. Practise it, my beloved; use all the means God has put into your hands to attain it, and you shall say, This very condition is the best for me. I know his loving heart too well to suppose that, if a more prosperous one would benefit my soul, make me more heavenly-minded, and bring me faster to heaven, I should not have it. I am content, O Lord; quite content. O the sweet peace I find, while the emanations of my will are but the reflected purposes of my God! Thou lovest me. This is my strong hold, and I must, I cannot but be satisfied with the will of Love. I have wished for more riches, more health, more domestic comforts; but when I reflect, what I have is quite good enough for me. I am a pilgrim, and shall not stay here long; and it matters little what my fare is by the way, if I do but come to my Father's house in peace. Persons on an excursion often say, Our lodgings are not quite so comfortable as we could wish them; but we can easily put up with

them, as we stay only a short time, and then we are going home. And shall I repine at a few troubles, which cross my corrupt inclinations, and require some sacrifices, when these are in the way to the mansions which Christ is gone to prepare for me in heaven? I cannot see, O Lord, as thou canst, nor feel as thou dost, or I should choose as thou choosest. I have therefore given up my property, my children, my servants, and myself, into thine hand, and henceforth would live like a child under a father's care, having all things provided without my own interference. Lord, not my will, but thine be done! I love that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of my God: acceptable indeed to me now, because I see it both good and perfect. To this end was I born again, that I should no longer live the rest of my time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. I have but One supremely to serve and love: freed from all my former lords which have had dominion over me, I now make mention only of his name, him only desiring to please, by obeying his will. Command there-

fore, O Lord, what thou wilt, and take from me what thou pleasest; thou hast my heart, and I am thine for ever. I am satisfied.

Do not suppose this to be a reverie of a fanciful imagination, or a state unattainable by christians of the present age. It is the direct fruit of acquaintance with God. The more fully I understand that all my parent commands me to perform, or requires me to sacrifice, is suggested by love to me, and will be conducive to my advantage, the more I shall feel satisfied with his will, and the more cheerfully render him obedience. Satisfaction in the will of God will arise from the same source, namely, a settled assurance that all the things which cross my will, however contrary to the common expectations of men, do spring from regard to my best interests, arise out of the plans of infinite wisdom, and will ultimately produce invaluable blessings. Now this satisfaction is to be gained by constant intercourse with God, and by no other plan. It is a life above a worldling. He is filled with plans and expedients to rid him-
f of his troubles, while the saint resolves them

into God's will, and finds peace. He is no more affected than a man would be, who hears the rattling of the hail, while he sits within the house at a sumptuous feast; if, as it were, looking out of the window, he sees the storm beating upon his estate, his children, and his temporal comforts, it touches not his inner man; for "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall cover him with his feathers, and under his wings shall he trust." He shall have warmth without heat; protection without oppression; rest without labour; ease without care. What a blessed condition! And this is all promised to those who acquaint themselves with God. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest; for he that hath entered into his rest hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his."

Peace, however, is not all we are to expect from acquaintance with God, for it is added, "good shall come unto thee." Now the promise implies the communication of every thing that can be considered a blessing; every thing

that can be esteemed a real good, suitable to our condition, and adapted to our happiness. The promise assures us good shall come to us: come, as a free gift; come to us, arise out of acquaintance with God by a direct and natural tendency; come to us, and abide with us for ever. The promise therefore includes several ideas.

1. TEMPORAL GOOD SHALL COME UNTO
THEE.

By this I do not mean that you shall have large possessions. It is not necessary to constitute our bliss, that we revel in luxury, or that we should be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day. Unsanctified wealth and poverty are both great curses; one can hardly tell which is the most productive of misery, the murmurings, discontent, and theft, occasioned by poverty, or the prodigality, profligacy, and penuriousness, which accompany wealth. Therefore Agur prayed: "Two things I have required of thee, deny me them not before I die; Remove far from me vanity and lies:

give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." In both these conditions one thing only was the object of dread to his mind: he does not fear riches, because he should be envied by his neighbour, or encumbered with care; nor poverty, because he must work for his bread, or be trampled on by the wealthy; but lest they should bring him greater temptations to sin against God. Agur supposed there was as much evil in one state as the other, and therefore deprecates both. If wealth and earthly prosperity be blessings, on how few of the best of men are they bestowed! The greater part of God's people are now, what they were formerly, "a poor and an afflicted people." You may discover the value God sets upon riches by the persons on whom, generally speaking, he bestows them. They are emphatically styled by the Psalmist, "*the men of the world*, who have their portion in this life, whose belly thou fillest with thy hidden treasures. I was envi-

was in the Jewish *synagogue*, when I saw the *persecutors* of the *weak*; and I went into the *sanctuary* of *God*, then understood I their *end*."

Seek them then the *great things* of this world for thyself? Seek them not; for the good promised *does not* consist in them. But acquaintance with *God* will stamp all your temporal possessions with a blessing.

It will sanctify them, and make them real *meanings* to you. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked." Furniture, and property, and comforts, he has perhaps in greater abundance than you; but so long as his heart is opposed to *God*, he has them with a curse. "But he blesseth the habitation of the just." Your domestic enjoyments will come to you through the channel of covenant love and faithfulness; that covenant which he has ordered in all things, and made sure: you will see them all coming immediately from his hand, and recognise the giver in the gift. You will make a *Jacob's-ladder* of them, and ascend by them to your Father and your *God*. If you are poor,

yea, in the situation of Lazarus, it will afford you an unmeasurable sweetness to look up, and say, The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot. I have no manors, but he is my inheritance; I have no silver cups, or golden tankards, to drink delicious wines from my cellar, but I drink of the rippling brook out of my brown earthen jug, and the water is made sweeter to me than wine, and the jug ennobled above gold, while I remember "the Lord is the portion of my cup." Yes; "the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places;" though I live in a cottage, I have with him "a goodly heritage." And what are earthly possessions without this blessing? The blessing of the Lord, that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it. I can eat my crumbs of bread, which have fallen from the rich man's table, or which I have earned with the sweat of my brow, and feel that, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where the love of God is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

If you are rich, acquaintance with God will teach you to hold all in trust for him; to use your ingenuity in making wings to your riches, that they may fly into the cottages of the poor, the laps of the household of faith, and the huts of the heathen, lest the rust should corrupt, and the moths eat, and thieves steal them; and so take away the corroding care of keeping them, and the distressing fear of losing them, and bring the blessing of him that was ready to perish upon you. It will fill you with the same pity which he who bestowed them upon you had for your soul. You will ask with wonder in his presence, Lord, why have I found grace in thy sight, and why hast thou taken knowledge of me, seeing I was a stranger to thee, as well as my poor neighbours; but am distinguished so far above them, as to be made an almoner of my Lord's bounty? You will find that there is a real luxury in such godlike activity; and that it is, as Jesus said, more blessed to give than to receive. And as fast as you lay out for God, his blessing will bring back again with interest. "Thy barns shall

be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Yes; "all these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store; blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out: and all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord." O my beloved, God shall never let you be losers by loving and serving him. Though he took away all that Job had for a little time, it was only that he might give him twice as much as he had before. And if he take it now from you, it is to make you rich towards God, that you may know better how to use it when he gives it you again. He can turn the heart of a miser into a springing well of liberality towards you, and, if you have need, command a widow woman to sustain you;

only acquaint yourselves with him, and be at peace, and good shall come unto you. Whether poor or rich, you shall have his blessing. He will rejoice over you to do you good, with his whole heart, and with his whole soul, saying, "O my Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord."

Acquaintance with God will *prove a check to sin.*

Offences are always more severely felt from an acquaintance than from a foe, because the laws of friendship strictly prohibit every act but those of mutual kindness. David said, "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him; but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." And God brings you into acquaintance with him, that the love which his presence inspires may make you fear to offend him. He *knows* that sin is the great preventive to the

communication of good, and that no happiness or blessing can rest where sin is committed. Sin introduced all our misery into the world, and can bring no other fruit. If you can be furnished with a motive strong enough to turn this enemy to God and yourself out of your house and your heart, good shall come unto you. And what motives can be stronger than love and gratitude? I was a guilty, polluted offender of my God, hurrying on to destruction careless of the consequences: "He found me in a desert land, in the waste howling wilderness; he led me about, he instructed me, he kept me as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead me, and there was no strange God with me. He raised me as a beggar from the dung-hill, and set me among princes, even the princes of his people." O how can I sin against him, my best friend? I would not grieve his kind heart for the world. He has laid me under such obligations to honour him

with my body and spirit, which are his, that I would rather lose all I have than excite his displeasure.

Dr. Doddridge informs us, that, when a poor Irish papist was condemned to death for murder, at Northampton, upon very questionable evidence; after some strict examination of his case, he became convinced of his innocence, and exerted himself to save his life; but his exertions were in vain, the man was executed. "What made the case more affecting to me, (says the Doctor,) was, that nothing could be more tender than his expressions of gratitude, and nothing more cheerful than his hope of deliverance had been. Among other things, I remember he said, 'Every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have had compassion upon every drop of it.' He wished he might, before he died, have leave to kneel at the threshold of my door to pray for me and mine; which indeed he did, on his knees, in the most earnest manner, as he was taking out to be executed. 'You,' saith he, 'are my redeemer in one sense, (*a poor impotent redeemer!*) and you have a

right to me. If I live, I am your property, and I will be a faithful subject.' ”

The Doctor's reflections on this event are the application I wish to make of it to you. “May I not learn from it gratitude to him who hath redeemed and delivered me? In which, alas! how far short do I fall of this poor creature! How eagerly did he receive the news of a reprieve for a few days! How tenderly did he express his gratitude; that he should be mine; that I might do what I pleased with him; that I had bought him; spoke of the delight with which he should see and serve me; that he would come once a year from one end of the kingdom to the other to thank me; and should be glad never to go out of my sight! O why do not our hearts overflow with such sentiments on an occasion infinitely greater! We were all dead men. Execution would soon have been done upon us: but Christ has redeemed us to God by his blood. We are not merely reprieved, but pardoned; not merely pardoned, but adopted; made heirs of eternal glory, and near the borders of it. In consequence of all

this we are not our own, but bought with a price. May we glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his!"

Yes, my beloved, acquaintance with God's love in Christ to your soul, will put a pleasing restraint upon your lusts and passions, your tempers and irregular habits. You will not dare to sin, because God, your God, is with you. Consciously beneath his eye, you cannot waste his time nor squander his property. Your habits will be those of a Christian, whose frugality, temperance, honesty, holiness, will not require a microscope to observe them. And does not good come to the man who imbibes such principles as these?

Acquaintance with God *will determine the choice of our acquaintance.*

How many have been ruined by wicked companions! What dreadful evils have entered families by the sad example of some bad associate! But this blessed acquaintance will give you a distaste for all society but that of those who resemble him with whom you live. In the *saints, the excellent of the earth*, will be all

your delight; the people who are travelling the same road, talk the same language, possess the same feelings, hopes, and desires, and expect to live with you in the kingdom of your Father for ever. Such society will bring good with them whenever they visit you; to further your peace and salvation, and help you on your way to heaven, will be the object of their ambition. With this view will you choose your servants, the tutors for your children, your partners in life, that you may be all of one mind in a house. And what good will not result from this? Your children will be preserved from unscriptural examples; your servants will yield to religious discipline; your own mind will be kept from the errors and follies of the multitude; and all will walk together in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Who can contemplate a family so modelled, a family diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; in their visits, in their dress, in their conversation, in their companions, having but one end in view, to serve and glorify the God of salvation, and

making haste to heaven; without exclaiming, "Jehovah Shammah," the Lord is there. What temporal happiness must be in such a house! It bears a near resemblance to the society of the redeemed above. Would you have such a family? Acquaint yourself with God, and be at peace; and this good shall come unto you.

Finally, Acquaintance with God will *silence your enemies*.

For "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." You will be very dear to Jehovah's heart, so that he who toucheth you will touch the apple of his eye. The shafts of the wicked shall not strike you, without first striking him. It is easy for him to restrain the cruel passions of your enemies, and this he will do if you love and serve him. "Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Babylon was always an enemy to Sion, but never injured her until she had offended her God; and then it was only necessary to loosen the cords by which he had restrained her. But no enemy was ever potent enough to hurt Sion,

while she maintained her acquaintance with God. Nor shall any one be suffered fully to overthrow your temporal happiness, though they may interrupt it, if you live to him and with him. For "who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" But if any are permitted to distress you, and ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; for he shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of tongues; thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace, and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, and so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

By acquaintance with God,

2. SPIRITUAL GOOD SHALL COME UNTO
THEE.

If you are acquainted with him, you are already blessed ; you have everlasting life. It is not a thing of which you are to be put in possession when you die ; you have it, as the pledge of your peace with God, and as the consequence of faith in his Son. The kingdom of God is already within you ; you have the first fruits of the Spirit, the blessed tokens of an abundant and enduring harvest. You are now in union with Christ, a member of a body of which he is the head. You are now in the way to glory, and whether the journey be long or short, you have the blessed assurance that you shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy. Now, beloved, consider what blessed fountains there are, to send holy streams of spiritual and heavenly good into your mind, what a reservoir of spiritual knowledge, comfort, delight, joy, and peace. Who can be thus blessed, and not be the better for it ? What can constitute bliss on earth, if these do not ?

One branch of spiritual good to be derived from acquaintance with God is, that *you will delight yourself in the Lord*: and O what blessedness is this to choose him as the supreme object of affection; to give him the throne of our hearts, and allow no rival; to obey his reasonable command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength;" to be so engrossed with his substantial fulness, that nothing in the creature appears worthy to be enjoyed in comparison with himself; to suffer the men of the world, who have their portion in this life, to take, unenvied, the increase of corn, and wine, and oil, and to ask no other boon but this, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me;" to forsake all for him, because we find all in him; to have a sanctified mind, which, when he calls, "Seek ye my face," shall cheerfully respond, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek;" to deny one's self wholly, having the heart so engaged with him, that this idol is cast out, and our wills resolved into his, to be at rest and quiet in his

your, which is better than life, finding our heaven in the contemplation of his love, and our happiness in his presence alone? Is not this a benefit?

Another branch of this spiritual good is, *to walk with God*; to make him our best companion; to take him on all occasions as our guide; to submit to no lord but himself, and to obey no laws but his; to yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead; to be upright, having our eyes turned heavenward, no longer to grovel on the earth in search of joy, but, with our arm of faith leaning on his everlasting arm, to walk with him in the path of regeneration: to look for the blessed hope which is laid up for us in heaven, whereof we have heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; to live momentarily under his eye, as if he were walking by our side; to feel all the confidence of a child in a father's society, "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved;" to be going forward, moving onwards to the habitation of his holiness, who "will confirm us unto the end, that we may

be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And you shall also have the spiritual advantage of *dwelling with God*. "The upright shall dwell in thy presence." This is to be no longer a stranger or a foreigner, but chosen to be one of his household; translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is to be a child of his family, in whom his own Spirit of adoption dwells, calling him Abba, Father; living under his paternal order and discipline; educated by the Lord himself, to be a king, and a priest, unto him for ever; receiving his loving, tender chastisements; sitting at his bountiful board, and satisfying himself with the plentiful provisions of his boundless benevolence; heir to all his Father's property, to the fulness of God; a joint-heir with Christ; clothed in the robe of righteousness, and the garment of salvation, and ornamented with the graces of his Spirit; comely through the comeliness which his Father put upon him; lodging all his cares in his

bosom, his property and concerns in his hands ; and finding this blessed consolation amidst the changes of this transitory scene, "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee ; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

But there is one spiritual benefit gained by acquaintance with God, which must be pressed on your attention. It is this: *likeness to your heavenly Father*. You were renewed in the image of him that created you, in the day of regeneration ; and that likeness does not wear off by age, as likeness to parents sometimes does ; but as you continue and increase in the knowledge of him, you will be more and more like him. We naturally contract the habits of the friends with whom we associate. We inadvertently, or, if we think them worthy of imitation, intentionally, think, speak, and act like them. So the council observed in the apostles a similarity to their Lord, whom they had not long before crucified ; "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

And your profiting will appear unto all by this friendship. Men will see his goodness, his mercy, his love, his compassion, his holiness, reflected by you, and acknowledge that God is in you of a truth. All that see you shall confess that you are the seed which the Lord hath blessed. And when all that is earthly passes from you, in the article of death you will prove the worth of the spiritual good which this heavenly acquaintance has brought you. Then to be calm and peaceful; to be anticipating glory; to be like a child leaving school for his father's house; to be saying with joy, "I shall behold thy face in righteousness: the time of my departure is at hand: I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: for me to die is gain: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ:" this, this, is a good indeed; compared with which, at that hour, the wealth of worlds is poverty.

By acquaintance with God,

ETERNAL GOOD SHALL COME UNTO THEE.

From one heaven you shall go to another, a better, a brighter, a purer; the perfection of that in which you have lived on earth. Here, your highest bliss was to love and serve your Lord; and there, the one shall be perfected, and the other uninterrupted. Lodged in the ark, you shall ride out safely every storm of life; and when the rain ceases to fall, and the winds to roar, this ark shall safely convey you to the haven of rest, where you shall ascend to the hill of Zion, the mountain of the Lord's house, the celestial heights of that wealthy place. You shall then have done with this mortal life. The silver cord, which fastened the soul to its earthly cage, shall be cut, and wings given to it, to fly away and be at rest. You shall have done with mortal cares. You shall put off the armour which impeded your progress, as a traveller takes off his heavy garments when he finishes his journey. No more domestic trouble; no more anxiety *about* the temporal or spiritual interests of your

family; no more cares for the church; no more tears for the ungodly; they shall fly away to a more congenial climate. You shall be interested in all that concerns the kingdom of Christ on earth, but without vexatious care. You shall have done with mortal sins. Your inbred adversary, which has interrupted every duty and marred every pleasure; which has caused clouds of sorrow to gather in your heart, and drop like rain from your eyes; which has occasioned your heavenly Father's desertion, and your own unfruitfulness; shall be not only subdued, but destroyed. Standing upon the banks of the heavenly Canaan, you shall sing the song of Moses anew, over sin and all his associates: the enemies which I have seen this day, and which have followed me all my life, I shall see them no more for ever. "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

Then what unutterable joy, and love, and wonder, shall fill your redeemed, purified, and exalted spirit, to find yourself in heaven, that country which you sought, and which God had

promised you: when you hear the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, pouring forth their hosannas in celestial harmony, to welcome you home to the glorious mansions, and kindling fresh ardour as they rise to the source of your blessedness: "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." While some, who knew you not on earth, shall pause a moment to inquire, Who is this that is arrayed in white robes? and whence came he? Your father, and mother, and brethren, and sisters, and children, and fellow pilgrims, shall say, This is he who came out of great tribulation, and has washed his robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And all shall unite again in rapturous chorus, "Therefore shall he be before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell with him. He shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on him, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne

shall feed him, and shall lead him to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes. But how must

—————His celestial voice
 Make your enraptured heart rejoice,
 When you in glory hear him ;
 While you, before the heavenly gate,
 For everlasting entrance wait,
 And Jesus, from his throne of state,
 Invites you to come near him !
 Come in, thou blessed, sit by me ;
 With mine own life I ransom'd thee ;
 Come, taste my perfect favour :
 Come in, thou happy spirit, come ;
 Thou now shalt dwell with me at home :
 Ye blissful mansions, make him room,—
 For he must stay for ever.

O to hear that voice speaking ineffable peace and consolation to your soul ; to see him as he is, whose glory infinitely surpasses all objects of nature and of art ; to see those dear hands, and feet, and head, whose wounds in suffering for you will be more brilliant and beautiful in your eye than the topaz of Ethiopia ; yea, to have his glory revealed in you ; to be perfectly like him, and to reign with him ; what a heaven will this be ! Then your unbounded desires,

which the whole creation could not limit, shall be satisfied with the full fruition of immortal love. You shall be refreshed with the emanations of uncreated life and joy, and drink at the fountain-head of pleasure. You shall mingle with society the most pure, perfect, and lovely, whose glory is only surpassed by him that sitteth upon the throne; with kindred spirits, in everlasting harmony. Your employment shall combine all the excellencies of ease, delight, and perpetuity. You will have nothing to do but to worship, and ability to worship for ever.

O yes! that sweet word *for ever*, shall be attached to every thing in glory. You shall eat of the tree of *life*; drink of the water of *life*; wear the crown of *life*; you shall be made a pillar in the temple of God, and there shall be no more going out.

But why do I presume to speak any more of the good that shall come unto you by acquaintance with God? Beloved, you must die to know it all. The half has not been told you. Till we can speak in the language of glory, the *rest must remain untold*.

But be it more than we can conceive, or has ever been revealed, it shall come unto you, if you acquaint yourself with God. Neither men nor devils shall be able to prevent it. "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." O blessed Jesus ! dost thou hold me ? Does thy pierced hand grasp my weak arm ? Does the Almighty God guard me to the heavenly paradise ? Then I defy the combined powers of earth and hell : for "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him, against that day."

THE END.





